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# N O H E R O :

## An Autobiography.

BY AMELIA B. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF "HAND AND GLOVE," "MY BROTHERS WIFE," &c., &c., &c.

REPRINTED FROM THE

"*Englishman's Weekly Literary Journal.*"

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"In John Lyly's *Endymion*, Sir Topes is made to say—'Dost thou know what a poet is? Why, fool, a poet is as much as one should say—a poet! And thou, reader, dost thou know what a hero is? Why, a hero is as much as one should say—a hero.'"—HYPERION.

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# N O H E R O .

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## CHAPTER I.

### MY BIRTH AND PARENTAGE.

"Dolce sentier, . . . .  
Colle, che mi piacesti,  
Ov'ancor per usanza amor mi mena!"

PETRARCH.

SWEET, secluded, shady Normandene! Show me, in all England, another hamlet so quaint, so picturesquely irregular, so thoroughly national in all its rustic characteristics, and I will hold my peace for evermore!

It lies in a warm hollow, environed by hills and sheltered by such masses of plummy foliage as no foreigner could believe in without seeing. Woods, parks, and young plantations clothe every height and slope for miles around, whilst here and there, peeping down through green vistas or towering above the tree-tops, stands many a fine old country mansion, turretted and gabled, and built of that warm red brick that seems to hold the light of the sunset long after it has faded from the rest of the landscape. A tiny streamlet, swift but shallow, runs noisily through the meadows beside the town, and loses itself in the Dene, about a mile and a half farther eastward. All sorts of picturesque old wooden bridges, foaming weirs, and ruinous water-mills with weedy wheels, may be found scattered up and down the wooded banks of this little river Dene; and to the brook, which we call the Gip-stream, is attached a vague tradition of trout.

The hamlet itself is clean and old-fashioned, consisting of one long, straggling street, and a few tributary lanes and passages. The houses, some few years back, were mostly long and low-fronted, with projecting upper storeys, and diamond-paned bay-windows, bowered in with myrtle and clematis; but modern improvements have done much of late to sweep away these antique tenements, and a fine new suburb of Italian and Gothic villas has sprung up between the town and the railway station. Besides this, we have a new church, where saints' days are respected, and candles burnt on the altar; and a new cemetery, laid out like a pleasure-garden, and a new school-house, where the children are taught upon a system with a foreign name; and a Mechanics' Institute, where London professors came down at long intervals to expound popular science, and the agriculturists meet to discuss popular grievances.

At the other extremity of the town, down by Dene Grange, an old, moated residence, where the squire's family have resided these four centuries past, we are full fifty years behind our modern neighbours. Here stands our famous old King's-head Inn, a place of well-known resort so early as the reign of Elizabeth. The great oak beside the porch is, possibly, as old as the house itself; and on the windows of the little disused parlour, looking on the garden, may still be seen the names of Sedley, Rochester, and other wits of the Restoration. They scrawled those autographs after dinner, most likely, with their diamond rings, and went reeling afterwards, arm-in-arm, along the village street, singing and swearing, and eager for adventures—as gentlemen were wont to do in those days when they drank the king's health more freely than was good for their own.

Not far from the King's Head, and almost hidden by the trees which divide it from the road, stands a curious old charitable institution called the College, mullion-windowed and many-gabled, and colonised by some twenty

aged people of both sexes. At the back of the College, adjoining a space of waste ground and some ruined cloisters, lies the church-yard, solemn with spreading yews and mouldering tombs, in the midst of which stands the Priory Church, as if watching over the sleepers. It is a rare old church, founded, according to the county history, in the reign of Edward the Confessor, and entered with a full description in Domesday Book. Its carven monuments and precious brasses, its Gothic crypt, oak-sculptured stalls, and tattered banners drooping over faded scutcheons, tell all of generations long gone by, of noble families extinct, of gallant deeds forgotten like their doers, of knights and ladies remembered only by the names above their graves. Amongst these, some two or three modest tablets record the passing away of several generations of my own predecessors; all were obscure country gentlemen, of whom some few became soldiers, and died abroad.

In close proximity to the church stands the vicarage, also a very quaint building, supposed to have been the Prior's house in times gone by, and surrounded by magnificent old trees. Here for long centuries, a tribe of rooks have held undisputed possession, filling the boughs with their nests, and the air with their voices, and, like genuine lords of the soil, descending at their own grave will and pleasure upon the adjacent lands.

Picturesque and mediæval as all these old buildings and old associations help to make us, we of Normandene still pretend to something more. We claim to be, not only picturesque, but aristocratic—not only aristocratic, but historic—not only historic, but classical:—

WE WERE FOUNDED BY THE ROMANS!

A great Roman road, well known to antiquaries, passed transversely through the old church-yard. Roman coins and relics have been found in all kinds of unexpected places in and about the town. Roman camps may be traced on most of the heights around. Above all, we are said to be indebted to the Romans for that inestimable breed of

fowls, in honour of which we have for years carried off the leading prizes at every poultry-show in the county, and been enabled to compete with even the exaggerated pretensions of modern Cochin-China interlopers.

Such, then, is Normandene, and such are its claims and attributes. Born beneath the shade of its towering trees and overhanging eaves, brought up to reverence its antiquities, and educated in the love of its natural beauties, what wonder that I cling to it with every fibre of my heart, and even when affecting to smile at my own fond prejudice, continued to believe it the loveliest and peace-fullest nook in rural England?

My father's name was Leigh, and he was the last surviving representative of the elder branch of our family. Although he had passed the College of Physicians in his youth, he was content with a general practice in his native town, and a life of useful obscurity. Our home stood at the corner of a lane towards the Eastern extremity of the town, commanding a view of the Squire's Park and a glimpse of the mill-pool and meadows in the valley beyond. This lane led up to Barnard's Green, a breezy space of high, uneven ground dedicated to fairs, cricket matches, and travelling circuses, whence the noisy music of brass bands, and the echoes of alternate laughter and applause, were wafted past our windows in the summer evenings. We had a large garden at the back, and a stable up the lane; and though the house was but one storey in height, it covered a considerable space of ground, and contained more rooms than we ever had occasion to use. Thus it happened that since my mother's death, which took place when I was a very little boy, many doors on the upper floor were kept locked, to the undue development of my natural inquisitiveness by day, and my mortal terror when sent to bed at night. In one of these her portrait still hung above the mantelpiece, and her harp stood in its accustomed corner. In another, which was once her bedroom, everything was left as

in her lifetime ; her clothing yet hanging in the wardrobe, her dressing-case standing upon the toilet, her favourite book upon the table beside the bed. These things, told to me by the servants with much mystery, took a powerful hold upon my childish imagination. I trembled as I passed the closed doors at dusk, and listened fearfully outside when the daylight gave me courage to linger near them. Something of my mother's presence, it seemed, must dwell within—something in her shape still wander from room to room in the dim moonlight, and echo back the sighing of the night-winds. Alas ! I was not permitted to remember her. Now and then, as if recalled by a dream, some broken and shadowy images of a pale face and a slender hand floated vaguely through my mind ; but faded even as I strove to realise them. Sometimes, too, when I was falling off to sleep in my little bed, or making out pictures in the fire on a winter evening, strange fragments of old rhymes seemed to come back upon me, mingled with the tones of a soft voice, and the murmuring of a long forgotten melody. But these, after all, were yearnings more of the heart than the memory :—

“ I felt a mother-want about the world,  
And still went seeking.”

To return to my description of my early home. The two rooms on either side of the hall, facing the road, were appropriated by my father for his surgery and consulting-room ; the two corresponding apartments at the back were respectively fitted up as our general parlour, and my father's bedroom. In the former of these, and in the weedy old garden upon which it opened, were passed all the days of my boyhood.

It was my father's pleasure never to send me to a public school, or to entrust my education to other than his own tutorship. Himself a general practitioner in a remote country town, his ambition aimed no higher for me than for himself, and he brought me up with no other view than to be his own successor. The profession was not to my



taste. Somewhat indolent and nervous by nature, there were few pursuits for which I was less fitted. I knew this, but dared not oppose him. Loving study for its own sake and trusting to the future for some lucky turn of destiny, I yielded to that which seemed inevitable, and strove to make the best of it. My father was a rough task-master, a domestic despot, and as irritable in temper as he was generous and well-meaning at heart. He prided himself on his surly straightforwardness, and manifested it, I confess, with admirable impartiality. If, as a father, he was occasionally too severe, he was no less ungracious as a medical attendant. He showed his temper alike to rich and poor, upon the smallest provocation, and often upon no provocation at all. People compared him to Abernethy ; by which, I fear, he was secretly flattered. Some even went so far as to argue that only a very clever man could afford to be a bear—a conclusion no less ingenious than consoling.

Thus it came to pass that I loved and feared my father at the same time ; lived a quiet, hard-working, home-life while other boys of my age were going through the joyous experience of school, and chose my companions from the dusty shelves of some three or four gigantic book-cases, instead of from the class and the playground. Not that I regret it. I believe, on the contrary, that a boy may have worse companions than books and busts, employments less healthy than the study of anatomy, and amusements more pernicious than Shakespeare and Horace. Thank heaven ! I escaped all these ; and if, as I have been told, my boyhood was unboyish, and my youth prematurely cultivated, I am well content to have been spared the vices in exchange for the pleasures of a public school.

I do not, however, pretend to say that I was at all times quite so philosophic, or that there were no occasions upon which I pined for the recreations common to my age. Well do I remember the manifold attractions of Barnard's

Green ! What longing glances I used to steal towards the boisterous cricketers, when going gravely forth upon a botanical walk with my father ! With what eager curiosity have I not lingered many a time before the entrance to a forbidden booth, and scanned the scenic advertisement of a travelling show ! Alas ! how the charms of study paled before those intervals of brief but bitter temptation ! What, then, was pathology compared to the pig-faced Lady, or the *Materia Medica* to Smith's Mexican Circus, patronised by all the Sovereigns of Europe ? But my father was inexorable. He held that such places were, to use his own words, "opened by swindlers for the ruin of fools," and from one never-to-be-forgotten hour, when he caught me in the very act of taking out my pennyworth at a portable peep-show, he bound me over by a solemn promise (sealed by a whipping) never to repeat the offence under any provocation or pretext whatsoever. I was a little fellow in pinafores when this happened, but I had as keen a notion of honour as any knight that ever wore spurs ; and, having once pledged my word, kept it faithfully through all the studious years that lay between six and sixteen.

At sixteen, an immense crisis occurred in my life. I fell in love. I had been in love before several times, chiefly with the elder pupils at the Misses Andrew's Establishment, and once (but that was when I was very young indeed) with the cook. This, however, was a much more romantic and desperate affair. The lady was by profession a Columbine, and as beautiful as an angel. She came down to our neighbourhood with a strolling company, and performed in a temporary theatre on the Green every evening for nearly three weeks. I used to steal out after dinner when my father was taking his nap, and run the whole way, that I might be in time to see the object of my adoration walking up and down the platform outside the booth before the performances commenced. This incomparable creature wore a blue petticoat spangled with tinfoil, and a wreath of faded poppies. Her age might have been about forty.

I thought her the loveliest of created beings. I wrote sonnets to her—dozens of them—intending to leave them at the theatre door, but never finding the courage to do it. I made up bouquets for her, over and over again, chosen from the best flowers in our neglected garden; but always with the same result. I hated the Harlequin who presumed to put his arm about her waist. I envied the clown, whom she condescended to address as Mr. Merri-man. In short, I was so desperately in love that I even tried to be awake at night, and lose my appetite; but, I am ashamed to own, failed signally in both endeavours.

At length I wrote to her. I can, even now, recall passages out of that passionate epistle. I well remember how it took me a whole morning to write it; how I crammed it with quotations from Horace; and how I fondly compared her to most of the mythological divinities. I then copied it out on pale blue paper, folded it in the form of a heart, directed it to Miss Angelina Lascelles, and left it, after dark, with the money-taker at the pit door. I signed myself, if I remember rightly, Pyramus. What would I not have given that evening to pay my sixpence, like the rest of the audience, and feast my eyes upon her from some obscure corner! What would I not have given to add my quota to the applause! But my promise to my father held me back; and even in that foolish extremity, I respected it. I could hardly sleep that night; I could hardly read or write, or eat my breakfast the next morning, for thinking of my letter, and its probable effect. It never once occurred to me that my Angelina might possibly find it difficult to construe Horace. Towards evening, I escaped again, and flew to Barnard's Green. It wanted nearly an hour to the time of performance; but the tuning of a violin was audible from within and the money-taker was already there, with his pipe in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets. I had no courage to address that functionary; but I lingered in his sight and sighed audibly, and wandered round and round the canvas,

walls that hedged my divinity. Presently he took his pipe out of his mouth, and his hands out of his pockets, surveyed me deliberately from head to foot, and said—

“Hollo there! are you the party that brought a three-cornered letter here last evening?”

I owned it, falteringly.

He lifted a fold in the canvas, and gave me a gentle shove between the shoulders.

“Then you’re to go in,” said he shortly. “She’s there, somewhere. You’re sure to find her.”

The canvas dropped behind me, and I found myself inside. My heart beat so first that I could scarcely breathe. The booth was almost dark, the curtain was down, and a gentleman with striped legs was lighting the footlamps. On the front pit bench, next the orchestra, discussing a plate of bread and meat, and the contents of a brown jug, sat a stout man in shirt-sleeves, and a woman in a cotton gown. The woman rose as I made my appearance, and asked, civilly enough, whom I pleased to want.

I stammered the name of Miss Angelina Lascelles.

“Miss Lascelles!” she repeated “I am Miss Lascelles.” Then, looking at me more narrowly, “I suppose,” she added, “you are the little boy who brought the letter?”

The little boy who brought the letter! Good heavens! And this middle-aged woman in a cotton gown—could she be indeed the Angelina of my dreams? The booth went round with me, and the lights danced before my eyes.

“If you have come for an answer,” she continued, “you may just say to your Mr. Pyramid that I am a respectable married woman, and he ought to be ashamed of himself, and, as for his letter, I never read such a heap of nonsense in my life! There, you can go out by the way you came in, and if you take my advice, you won’t come back again!”

How I went out, whether the door-keeper spoke to me as I passed, and what I did for the first few minutes, I

have no idea to this day. I only know that I flung myself on the damp grass under a great tree in the first field I came to, and shed tears of such shame, disappointment, and wounded pride as my eyes had never known before. She had called me a little boy, and my letter a heap of nonsense! She was elderly, she was ignorant—she was married! I had been a fool; but there was no consolation in that discovery.

It only made matters worse, and my pain the harder to bear. By and by, while I was yet sobbing and disconsolate, I heard the drumming and fifing which heralded the appearance of the *Corps Dramatique* on the outer platform. I resolved to see her for the last time. I pulled my cap over my eyes, went back resolutely to the Green, and mingled with the crowd outside the booth. It was approaching dusk; I observed her narrowly, and I saw that her ankles were thick, and her elbows red. The illusion was all over. The spangles had lost their lustre, and the poppies their glow. I no longer hated the harlequin, or envied the clown, or felt anything but mortification at my own folly.

“Miss Angelina Lascelles, indeed!” I said to myself, as I sauntered moodily home. “Pshaw! I shouldn’t wonder if her name were Snooks!”



## CHAPTER II.

### THE LITTLE CHEVALIER.

"A mere anatomy, a mountebank,  
A threadbare juggler."—COMEDY OF ERRORS.

"Nay, then, he is a conjuror."—K. HENRY VI.

My adventure with Miss Lascelles did me a great deal of service, and cured me, for some time, at least, of my leaning towards the tender passion. I consequently devoted myself more closely than ever to my studies—indulged in a passing mania for genealogy and heraldry—began a collection of local geological specimens, all of which I threw away at the end of the first fortnight—and took to rearing rabbits in an old tumble-down summer-house at the end of the garden. I also believe that from somewhere about this time I may date the commencement of a great epic poem in blank verse, and heaven knows how many cantos, which was to be called the Columbiad. It began, I remember, with a description of the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella, and the departure of Columbus, and was intended to celebrate the discovery, colonization, and subsequent history of America. I never got beyond ten or a dozen pages of the first canto, however, and that trans-Atlantic epic remains unfinished to this day.

The great event which I have recorded in the preceding chapter took place in the early summer. It must, therefore, have been towards the close of autumn in the same year when my next important adventure befell. This time the temptation wore a very different shape.

Coming briskly homewards one fine frosty morning, after having left a note from my father at the Vicarage,

I saw a bill-sticker busily employed upon a line of dead wall which at that time reached from the Red Lion Inn to the corner of Pitcairn's lane. The posters were of every known colour, printed in the largest possible type, and decorated with a florid bordering in which the signs of the zodiac conspicuously figured. Being somewhat idly disposed, I followed the example of other passers-by, and lingered to watch the process and read the advertisement It ran as follows :—

**Magic and Mystery! Magic and Mystery!**

M. LE CHEVALIER ARMAND PROUDHINE,

(of Paris) surnamed

**THE WIZARD OF THE HIMALAYAS,**

Has the honor to announce to the Nobility and Gentry of Normandene and its vicinity, that he will, to-morrow evening, (October—18—) hold his First

**SOIREE FANTASTIQUE**

IN

**THE LARGE ROOM OF THE RED LION HOTEL.**

ADMISSION 1s. RESERVED SEATS, 2s. 6d.

*To commence at Seven.*

N. B.—*The Performance will include a variety of new and surprising feats of Legerdemain never before exhibited.*

*A soiree fantastique!* what would I not give to be present at a *soiree fantastique!* I had read of the Rosicrucians, of Count Cagliostro, and of Doctor Dee. I had peeped into more than one curious treatise on Demonology, and I fancied that there could be nothing in the world half so wonderful as that last remaining branch of the Black Art entitled the Science of Legerdemain.

I asked myself if it would be possible to obtain permission for this one occasion. My father's prejudice

against public entertainments was strong ; but then, what could be more genteel than the programme, or more select than the prices ? How different was an entertainment given in the large room of the Red Lion Hotel, to a three-penny wax-work, or a strolling circus on Barnard's Green. I had been in that very room, over and over again, when the Vicar read his celebrated "Discourses to Youth," or Dr. Dunks came over from Grinstead to deliver an explosive lecture on chemistry ; and I had always seen the reserved seats filled by the best families in the neighbourhood. Fully persuaded of the force of my own arguments, I made up my mind to prefer this momentous request on the first favorable opportunity ; and so hurried home with my head full of quite other thoughts than usual. My father was sitting at the table with a mountain of books and papers before him. He looked up sharply as I entered, jerked his chair round so as to get the light at his back, put on his spectacles, and ejaculated :—

"Well, Sir !"

This was a bad sign, and one with which I was only too well acquainted. Nature had intended my father for a barrister. He owned the true inquisitorial instincts, and would have conducted a cross-examination to perfection. As it was, he indulged in a good deal of amateur practice, and, from the moment when he turned his back to the light, and donned the inexorable spectacles, there was not a soul in the house, from myself down to the errand boy, who was not perfectly aware of something unpleasant to follow. Having nothing to reply to this greeting, I looked out of the window, and remained silent, whereby, unfortunately, I only irritated him the more.

"Confound you, Sir !" he exclaimed, "have you nothing to say ?"

"Nothing that I am aware of," I replied, doggedly.

"Stand there !" he said, pointing to a particular square in the pattern of the carpet. "Stand there !"

I obeyed.

"Hah ! now, perhaps, you will have the goodness to explain what you have been about this morning, and why it should have taken you just thirty-seven minutes by the clock to accomplish a journey which a tortoise—yes, Sir, a tortoise,—might have done in less than ten?"

I gravely compared my watch with the clock before replying.

"Upon my word, sir," I said, "your tortoise would have the advantage of me."

"The advantage of you ! what do you mean by the advantage of you, you affected puppy?"

"I had no idea," said I provokingly, "that you were in any unusual haste this morning."

"Haste !" shouted my father. "Haste indeed ; I never said I was in haste. I never choose to be in haste. I hate haste !"

"Then, why?"

"Because you have been wasting your time and mine, Sir," interrupted he, "and conducting yourself like an idler and a vagabond !"

My *sang froid* was gone directly.

"An idler and a vagabond !" I repeated angrily, "I defy you to prove that ; I never conduct myself unlike a gentleman !"

"Humph !" growled my father, mollified but sarcastic ; "a pretty gentleman—a gentleman of sixteen !"

"It is true," I continued, without heeding the interruption, "that I lingered for a moment to read a placard by the way ; but if you will take the trouble, Sir, to enquire at the Rectory, you will find that I waited a quarter of an hour before I could send up your letter."

My father grinned and rubbed his hands. If there was one thing in the world that aggravated him more than another, it was to find his fire opposed to ice. Let him, however, succeed in igniting his adversary, and he was in a good humour directly.

"Come, come, Stanton," said he, taking off his spectacles, "I never said you were not a good lad; go to your books, boy—go to your books; and this evening I will examine you in vegetable physiology."

Silently, but not sullenly, I drew a chair to the table, and resumed my work; we were both satisfied, and each in his heart considered himself the victor. My father exulted because he had irritated me, and I because he had, in some sort, withdrawn the expressions that annoyed me. The result was, that we both grew good-tempered, and, according to our own tacit fashion, continued during the rest of that morning to be rather more than usually sociable.

Hours passed thus—hours of quiet study—during which the quick travelling of my pen, or the occasional turning of a page alone disturbed the silence. The warm sunlight which shone in so greenly through the vine leaves, stole, step by step, round the broken vases in the garden beyond, and touched their brown mosses with a golden bloom. The patient shadow on the antique sundial wound its way imperceptibly from left to right, and the slanting threads of light and shadow that record the coming of the afternoon, pierced in time between the branches of the poplars. Our mornings were long; and while my father paid professional visits, I devoted my hours to study. It seldom happened that he could spend an entire day with his books, and the present was an exceptional occasion. Even to-day it seemed, however, that he was not to be permitted a genuine holiday, for just as the clock struck four, there came a ring at the surgery bell.

My father twisted his features into a rapid grimace, and settled himself obstinately in his chair.

"If that's a gratis patient," said he, between his teeth, "I'll not stir. From seven to ten are their hours, confound them!"

"If you please, Sir," said Mary, peeping in, "if you please, Sir, it's a gentleman."



"A stranger?" asked my father. Mary nodded, put her hand to her mouth and burst into an irrepressible giggle.

"If you please, Sir," she began, but could get no farther.

My father was in a towering passion directly.

"Is the girl mad?" he said furiously. "You idiot, what is the meaning of this buffoonery?"

"Oh, sir—if you please, sir," ejaculated Mary, struggling with terror and laughter together, "its the gentleman, Sir. He—he says, if you please, Sir, that his name is Almond Pudding!"

"Almond pudding!" repeated my father, incredulously. "Impossible!"

"Your pardon, Mademoiselle, said a plaintive voice." Armand Proudhine—Monsieur le Chevalier Armand Proudhine, at your service."

Mary disappeared with her apron to her mouth, and subsided into distant peals of laughter, leaving the Chevalier standing in the doorway.

He was a very little man, with a pinched and melancholy countenance, and an eye as wistful as a dog's. His threadbare clothes, made in the fashion of a dozen years before, had been decently mended in many places. A paste pin in a faded cravat, and a jaunty cane with a pinchbeck top, betrayed that he was still somewhat of a beau. His scant grey hair was tied behind with a piece of black ribbon, and he carried his hat under his arm, like some old-fashioned portraits of Ellisten, and the Prince of Wales.

He advanced a step, bowed, and laid his card upon the table.

"I believe," he said in his plaintive voice, and imperfect English, "that it is my honour to introduce myself to Monsieur Leigh."

"If you want me, Sir," said my father, gruffly, "I am Doctor Leigh."

"And, I Monsieur," said the little Frenchman, laying his hand upon his heart, and bowing again—"I am the Wizard of the Himalayahs."

"The what?" exclaimed my father.

"The Wizard of the Himalayahs," replied our visitor, impressively.

There was an awkward pause, during which my father looked at me and touched his forehead significantly with his fore-finger; while the Chevalier, embarrassed between his natural timidity and his desire to appear of importance, glanced from one face to the other, and waited some reply suitable to his announcement. I endeavoured to disentangle the situation.

"Excuse me," I said, "but I think I can explain this mystery. Monsieur le Chevalier will perform to-morrow evening in the large room of the Red Lion Hotel. He is a professor of legerdemain."

"Of the marvellous art of legerdemain, Monsieur Leigh," interrupted the Chevalier, eagerly. "Prestidigitatem to the Court of Saxony, and successor to Al Hakim, the wise. It is I, Monsieur, that have invent the famous *tour du pistolet*; it is I, that have originate the great and surprising deception of the bottle; it is I whom the world does surname the Wizard of the Himalayahs. *Me voici!*"

Carried away by the force of his own eloquence, the Chevalier fell into an attitude at the conclusion of his little speech; but, remembering where he was, blushed, and bowed again.

"Pshaw," said my father, impatiently "the man's a conjuror."

The little Frenchman did not hear him. He was at that moment busily untying a packet which he carried in his hat, the contents whereof appeared to consist of a number of very small pink and yellow cards. Selecting a couple of each kind, he deposited his hat carefully upon the floor, and came a few steps nearer to the table.

"Monsieur will give me the hope to see him, with Monsieur *son fils*, at my Soiree Fantastique, *n'est ce pas ?*" he asked, timidly.

"Sir," said my father shortly, "I never encourage peripatetic mendicity."

The little Frenchman looked puzzled.

"*Comment ?*" said he, and glanced to me for an explanation.

"I am very sorry, Monsieur," I interposed hastily, "but my father objects to every kind of public entertainment."

"*Ah, mon Dieu*, but not to this!" cried the Chevalier, raising his hands and eyes in deprecating astonishment. "Not to my Soiree Fantastique! The art of legerdemain, Monsieur, is not immoral. He is graceful, he is surprising, he is innocent; and, Monsieur, he is patronised by the Church; he is patronised by your amiable Cure, Monsieur le Docteur Brand."

"Oh, father," I exclaimed, "do you hear that? Dr. Brand has taken tickets."

"And pray, Sir, what's that to me?" growled my father, without looking up from the book which he had ungraciously resumed. "Let Dr. Brand make a fool of himself if he pleases, I'm not bound to do the same, am I?"

The Chevalier blushed crimson—this time not with humility, but pride. He gathered the cards into his pocket, took up his hat, and saying stiffly—"Monsieur, *je vous demande pardon*,"—moved towards the door.

On the threshold he paused, and turning towards me with an air of faded dignity:—"Young gentleman," he said, "you I thank for your politeness."

He seemed about to say more, grew lividly pale, raised his hands to his head, and leaned for support against the wall.

My father was up, and beside him in an instant. We carried rather than led him to the sofa, untied his cravat, and administered the necessary restorative. He was all

but insensible for some moments, and looked about him with a bewildered and melancholy expression. Then the colour came back to his lips, and he sighed heavily.

"An attack of the nerves," he said, shaking his head, feebly "An attack of the nerves, Messieurs."

My father looked doubtful.

"Are you often taken in this manner?" he asked, with unusual gentleness.

"*Mais oui, Monsieur,*" admitted the Frenchman, reluctantly. "He does often arrive to me. Not—not that I believe he is dangerous. Ah, bah! *Pas du tout!*"

"Humph!" ejaculated my father, more doubtfully than before. "Let me feel your pulse."

The Chevalier bowed, and submitted, watching the countenance of the operator all the time with an anxiety that was not lost upon me.

"Do you sleep well?" asked my father, holding the fragile little wrist between his finger and thumb.

"Passably, Monsieur."

"Dream much?"

"Ye—es—I dream."

"And are subject to giddiness?"

The Chevalier shrugged his shoulders, and looked uneasy.

"*C'est vrai,*" he acknowledged, more unwillingly than ever, "*J'ai des vertiges.*"

My father relinquished his hold, and scribbled a rapid prescription.

"There, Sir," said he, "take that, and when you next feel as you felt just now, get the preparation made up. Indeed, I should recommend you always to keep some at hand, in case of emergency. You will find further directions on the other side."

The little Frenchman attempted to get up with his usual vivacity; but was obliged to balance himself against the back of a chair.

"Monsieur," said he, with another of his profound

bows," I thank you infinitely. You make me too much attention ; but I am grateful. And, Monsieur, my little girl, my child, that is far away across the sea, she thanks you also. *Elle m'aime, Monsieur—elle m'aime, cette pauvre petite !* What shall she do if I die ?"

Again he laid his hand upon his head. He had no thought that the gesture was theatrical. He was in sad earnest, and his eyes were wet with tears, which he made no effort to conceal.

My father shuffled restlessly in his chair.

"No obligation—no obligation at all," he muttered, with a touch of impatience in his voice. "And now, what about those tickets? I suppose Stanton, you're dying to be among the audience?"

"Indeed, father," I said, joyfully, "there is nothing I should like better."

The Chevalier glided forward, and laid a couple of little pink cards upon my father's desk.

"If," said he, timidly, "if Monsieur will make me the honor to accept."

"Not for the world, Sir; not for the world," interposed my father; "the boy shan't go, unless I pay for the tickets."

"But, Monsieur"—

"Nothing of the kind, Sir; I cannot hear of it. What are the prices of the seats?"

Our little visitor looked down, and was silent; but I replied for him.

"The reserved seats," I whispered, "are half-a-crown each."

"Then I will take eight reserved," said my father, opening a drawer in his desk, and bringing forth a bright new sovereign.

The little Frenchman started. He could hardly believe in such munificence.

"When? How much?" stammered he, with a pleasant confusion of adverbs.

"Eight," growled my father, scarcely able to repress a smile.

"Eight!" *mon Dieu*, Monsieur, now you are generous! I shall keep for you all the first row."

"Oblige me by doing nothing of the kind," said my father, very decisively. "It would annoy me extremely."

The Chevalier counted out the eight little pink cards, and ranged them in a row beside my father's desk.

"Count them, Monsieur, if you please," said he, his eyes wandering involuntarily towards the sovereign.

My father did so, with much gravity, and handed over the money.

The Chevalier consigned it, with trembling fingers, to a small canvas bag, which looked very empty, and which came from the deepest recesses of his pocket.

"Monsieur," said he, "my thanks are in my heart. I will not annoy you with them. Good morning."

He bowed again, for perhaps the twentieth time, lingered a moment at the threshold, as if he had still something more to say, and then retired, closing the door softly after him.

My father rubbed his head all over, and gave a great yawn of satisfaction.

"I am so much obliged to you, sir," I said eagerly.

"What for?"

"For having bought those tickets. It was very kind of you."

"Hold your tongue. I hate to be thanked," snarled he, and plunged back again into his books and papers.

Once more the studious silence in the room—once more the rustling leaf and scratching pen, which only made the stillness seem more still, within and without.

"I beg your pardons," murmured the voice of the little Chevalier.

I turned, and saw him peeping through the half-opened door. He looked more wistful than ever, and twisted the handle nervously between his fingers.

My father frowned, and muttered something between his teeth; I fear it was not very complimentary to the Chevalier.

"One word, Monsieur," pleaded the little man, edging himself round the door, "one small word!"

"Say it, Sir, and have done with it," said my father, savagely.

The Chevalier hesitated.

"I—I—Monsieur le Docteur—that is, I wish"—

"Confound it, Sir, what do you wish?"

The Chevalier brushed away a tear.

"*Dites-moi*," he said with suppressed agitation—"one word, yes, or no—is he dangerous?"

My father's countenance softened.

"My good friend," he said, quite quietly, "we are none of us safe for even a day, or an hour; but after all, that which we call danger is a merely relative position. I have known men in a state more precarious than yours, who lived to a long old age, and I see no reason to doubt that, with good living, good spirits, and precaution, you may stand as fair a chance."

The little Frenchman pressed his hands together in token of gratitude, whispered a broken word or two of thanks, and bowed himself out of the room.

When he was fairly gone, my father flung a book at my head, and said, with more brevity than politeness—

"Boy, bolt the door."

## CHAPTER III.

### ON THE PLEASURES AND PROFITS OF LEGERDEMAIN.

"If this is magic, let it be an art!"

#### WINTER'S TALK.

Reader, yclept of old kind, courteous, and gentle, has it never occurred to thee how pleasurable, how honourable, how philosophical, and, withal, how advantageous, is the profession of a conjuror? Hast thou never been tempted to fly the world of Belgravia, or Bloomsbury, and revenge the slights of fortune by adopting sleight-of-hand? What, after all, has society to offer in comparison with the wonders of Wizardland? Of how little moment are our labours or successes beside those of Anderson, Dobler, Houdin, and Frikell? What, for instance, can you or I do, if brought into competition with men of their mark and likelihood? Write a book, perhaps; or paint a picture; or compose a symphony, which many others can do as well, or better. But can either of us pour ten different wines out of one bottle, or rain a hundred weight of bonbons out of an empty hat? No; not if the fate of Europe depended thereon. Hazlitt confessed that he felt ashamed of himself after he had witnessed the performance of the Indian jugglers. I am willing to go a step farther, and acknowledge that until I had been present at a certain *matinée mystique* held once upon a time within the limits of the Palais Royal, I did something less than justice to the intelligence of my fellow-men.

The conjuror, seen under every aspect, is an admirable and enviable being. His is the triumph of eloquence and dexterity. He alone effectually accomplishes that which we are all attempting every day, in our various callings;



he deceives to perfection. Eye, voice, and hand are alike called into play. He carries his audience by a *coup de main*, and, though performing miracles, possesses the delightful secret of appearing unconscious, and at ease. He is one of the most candid of men; for he admits the artifices of art, and denies not that he deals with the show, but not the seal of truth. He is also one of the most upright, since, having it in his power to become an accomplished swindler, he chooses to remain an honest citizen, and only tricks us "upon occasion." What shall we not say in praise of one who, being able to spirit our rings off our fingers, and our cash out of our pockets, is content to do neither the one nor the other!—who has but to walk up Fleet Street and reap repeaters by the dozen, and yet (by suffering us to retain possession of our chains and chronometers) has never reduced us to the necessity of keeping watch and guard over himself.

The conjuror, by the very nature of his profession, is exempt from half the cares and incertitudes of life. He sees smiling faces wherever he goes. He has his fortune, literally, at his fingers' ends. He despises the fluctuations of the money market, and, god-like, scorns the very name of taxes. What are the Funds to him? What does he care for the Income Tax? If he wants a purse, he has only to cut open the first orange that comes in his way, and there he finds one, full of fairy gold. If his wardrobe needs renewal, he has but to make a bonfire of his old shirts and pocket-handkerchiefs, and they will rise up, phoenix-like and rejuvenescent, from the *debris* of their own ashes. Cast him forth upon the world with nothing but a pack of cards to depend upon, and he will, even then, beat his neighbour at any game of speculation you may set before him. Accustomed to deal with the follies and credulities of mankind, he knows how to cut diamond with diamond, and, if driven to extremities, could doubtless play the knave or the deuce, according to circumstances.

Not, then, to consider the matter too curiously, is it not well proven, oh, most refined and compliant of readers! that our conjuror is a prince in creation—a being of superior calibre—an animal partaking of our outward characteristics, but raised by virtue of his means and attributes to something beyond the ordinary measure of humanity? Does he not inherit his art direct from Prospero, and is it not a right royal lineage to boot? Nay, were we to suffer ourselves to pursue the subject much farther, we would undertake to prove that he traces his geneological tree back to Archimago and Merlin, and that he has Shakespeare and Spenser for his godfathers!

But enough, parenthetically, for the pleasures and profits of Legerdemain.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE EVENTS OF AN EVENING.

"Stanton, my boy, if you are going to that place to night, you must take Collins with you."

"Won't you go yourself, father?"

"I!—I go. Is the boy mad?"

"Not yet, Sir, I hope," I replied, demurely, "only as you bought eight tickets for the reserved seats, I thought—"

"You've no business to think, Sir! seven of those tickets are in the fire."

"For fear then, that you should fancy to burn the eighth, which is in my pocket, father, I'll wish you good evening!"

So away I darted, called to Collins to follow me, and set off at a brisk pace towards the Red Lion Hotel. Collins was our groom and stableman; a sharp, merry fellow, some ten years older than myself, who desired no better employment than to escort me upon occasions like the present. The audience had begun to assemble when we arrived. Collins went into the shilling places, while I ensconced myself in the second row of reserved seats. I had an excellent view of the stage. There, in the middle of the platform, stood the conjuror's table—a quaint, cabalistic-looking piece of furniture, with carved black legs, and a deep bordering of green cloth all round the top. A gay pagoda-shaped canopy of many hues was suspended overhead. A long white wand leaned up against the wall. To the right stood a bench laden with mysterious jars, glittering bowls, gilded cones, mystical globes, boxes of coloured glass, and other properties. To the left stood a

large arm-chair covered with crimson cloth. All this was very exciting, and I waited with the keenest anticipative delight, till the Wizard should appear.

He came at last ; but not surely, our dapper little visitor of yesterday ! A majestic beard of ashen grey fell in patriarchal locks almost to his knees ; upon his head he wore a high cap of dark fusil, upon his feet embroidered slippers, and round his waist a glittering belt patterned with hieroglyphic figures. A long robe, chocolate and orange, fell about him in heavy folds, and swept behind him, like a train. I could not believe, at first, that it was the same person ; but, when he spoke, despite the pomp and obscurity of his language, I recognised the plaintive voice of the little Chevalier.

*"Mesdames and Messieurs,"* he began, and took up the wand to emphasise his discourse, "to read in the stars the events of the future—to transform with gold the metals inferior—to discover the composition of the Elixir who, by himself, would perpetuate life, was in past ages the aim and aspiration of the natural philosopher. But they are gone, those days—they are displaced, those sciences. The Alchemist and the Rosicrucian are no more, and of all their race, the professor of Legerdemain alone survives. Ladies and gentlemen, my magic is simple. I employ not familiars. I have not crucible, nor furnace, nor retort ; I but amuse you with my agility of hand, and for commencement I tell you that you shall be deceived as well as the Wizard of the Himalayahs can deceive you."

His voice trembled, and the slender wand shook palpably in his hand. Was this nervousness, or was he, in accordance with the quaintness of his costume and the amplitude of his beard, enacting the feebleness of age ?

He advanced to the front of the platform. "Three things I require," he said. "A watch, a pocket handkerchief, and a hat. Is there here among my visitors any person so gracious as to lend me these trifles ? I will not injure them, ladies and gentlemen. I will only pound

the watch in my mortar—burn the *mouchoir* in my lamp, and made a pudding in the *chapeau*. And, with all this, I engage to return them to their proprietors, better as new."

There was a pause, and a laugh. Presently a gentleman volunteered his hat, and a lady her embroidered handkerchief; but no person seemed willing to submit his watch to the pounding process.

"Shall nobody lend me the watch?" asked the Chevalier; but in a voice so hoarse that I scarcely recognised it. A sudden thought struck me, and I rose in my place.

"I shall be happy to do so," I said aloud, and made my way round to the front of the platform.

At the moment when he took it from me, I spoke to him.

"Monsieur Proudhine," I whispered, "you are ill! What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, *mon enfant*," he answered in the same low tone, "I suffer; *mais il faut se résigner*."

"Break off the performance—retire for half an hour."

"Impossible, see, they already observe us!"

And he drew back abruptly. There was a seat vacant in the front row, and I took it, resolved at all events to watch him narrowly.

Not to detail too minutely the events of a performance which, since that time, has become sufficiently familiar, I may say that he carried out his intentions with dreadful exactness, and, after appearing to burn the handkerchief to ashes, and mix up a quantity of eggs and flour in the hat, proceeded very coolly to smash the works of my watch beneath his ponderous pestle. Notwithstanding my faith, I began to feel seriously uncomfortable. It was a neat little silver watch of foreign workmanship—not very valuable, to be sure, but precious to me as the finest of repeaters, and purchased from the economics of my boyish income.

"He is very tough, your watch, Monsieur," said the

Wizard, pounding away vigorously. He—he takes a long time—to—*Ah ! mon Dieu !*"

He raised his hand to his head, uttered a faint cry, and seemed no longer able to support himself.

My first thought was that he had destroyed my watch by mistake—my second, that he was very ill indeed. Scarcely knowing what I did, and quite forgetting the audience, I jumped on the platform to his aid.

He shook his head, waved me away with one trembling hand, made a last effort to articulate, and fell heavily to the ground.

All was confusion in an instant, everybody crowded to the stage, and I, with presence of mind which afterwards surprised myself, made my way out by a side-door, and ran for my father. He was, fortunately, at home, and in less than ten minutes the Chevalier was under his care. We found him laid upon a sofa in one of the sitting rooms of the inn, pale, rigid, and insensible. They had taken off his cap and beard, and the landlady was endeavouring to pour some brandy down his throat ; but his teeth were fast set, and his lips blue and cold.

"Oh, Doctor Leigh ! Doctor Leigh !" cried they, "the Conjuror is dying !"

"For which reason, I suppose, you are all trying to smother him !" said my father angrily. "Mrs. Blake, I beg you will not trouble yourself to pour that brandy down the man's throat. He has no more power to swallow it than my stick. Stanton, open the window, and help me to loosen these things about his throat. Good people all, I must request you to leave the room. This man's life is in peril, and I can do nothing while you remain. Go home—go home. You will see no more conjuring to-night.

My father was preemptory, and the crowd unwillingly dispersed. One by one they left the room and gathered discontentedly in the passage. When it came to the last two or three, he took them by the shoulders, closed the door upon them, and turned the key.

Only the landlady, an elderly woman servant, and myself remained.

The first thing my father did was to examine the pupil of the patient's eye, and lay his hand upon his heart. It still fluttered feebly, but the action of the lungs was suspended, and his hands and feet were cold as death.

My father shook his head.

"This man must be bled" said he; "but I have little hope of saving him."

He was bled, and, though still unconscious, became less rigid. They then poured a little wine down his throat, and he fell into a passive but painless condition, more inanimate than sleep, and less positive than a state of trance.

A fire was then lighted, blankets were brought down and wrapped about the patient, and my father announced his determination to sit up with him all night. In vain I begged to remain and share his vigil. He would hear no such thing; but turned me out as he had turned out the others, bade me a brief "Good-night," and desired me to run home as quickly as I could.

To hear was to obey, at that stage of my history, so I took my way quietly through the bar of the hotel, and was just turning out of the door when a touch on my sleeve arrested me. It was Mr. Blake, the landlord, a portly, red-whiskered Boniface, of the old English type.

"Good evening, Mr. Stanton Leigh," said he, "going home, Sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake," I replied sadly, "I can be of no further use here."

"Well, Sir, you've been of more use this evening than anybody—let alone the Doctor—that I must say for you," observed Mr Blake, approvingly, "I never see such pluck and presence o' mind in so young a gen'leman before—never, Sir. Have a glass of grog and a cigar, Sir, before you turn out."

Much as I felt flattered by the supposition that I smoked (which was more than I could have done to save my

life), I declined Mr. Blake's obliging offer, and wished him good night. But the landlord of the Red Lion was in a gossiping humour, and would not let me go.

"If you won't take spirits, Master Stanton," said he, "you must have a glass of negus. I couldn't let you go out without something warming—particular after the excitement you have gone through. Why, bless you, Sir, when they ran out and told me, I shook like a leaf—and I don't look like a very nervous subject, do I? And so sudden as it was, too, poor little gentleman!"

"Very sudden, indeed," I replied, mechanically.

"Does Doctor Leigh think he'll get the better of it, Master Stanton?"

"I fear he has little hope."

Mr. Blake sighed, and shook his head, and smoked in silence.

"To be struck just at a time when he was playing such tricks as them conjuring dodges, seems uncommon awful," said he, after a time. "What was he after at the minute?—making a pudding, wasn't he, in some gentleman's hat?"

I uttered a sudden exclamation, and set down my glass untasted. Till that moment I had never once thought of my watch.

"Oh, Mr. Blake!" I cried, "he was pounding my watch in the mortar! what has become of it, what shall I do?"

"Do!" echoed the landlord, seizing a candle; "why, go and look for it, to be sure, Master Stanton. That's safe enough, you may be sure!"

I followed him to the room where the performance had taken place. It showed darkly and drearily by the light of one feeble candle. The benches and chairs were all in disorder. The wand lay where it had fallen from the hand of the wizard.

The mortar still stood on the table, with the pestle beside it. It contained only some fragments of broken glass and China.



Mr. Blake laughed triumphantly.

"Come, sir," said he, "the watch is safe enough, at all events. Mounseer only made believe to pound it up, and now all that concerns us is to find it."

That was indeed all—not only all, but too much. We searched everything. We looked in all the jars, and under all the moveables. We took the cover off the chair, and examined every piece of furniture; but without success. My watch had totally disappeared, and we at length decided that it must be concealed about the conjuror's person. Mr. Blake was my consoling angel.

"Bless you, sir," said he, "don't never be cast down. My wife shall look for the watch to-morrow morning, and I'll promise you we'll find out every pocket he had about him."

"And my father—you won't tell my father," I said dolefully.

Mr. Blake replied by a mute, but expressive piece of pantomime, and took me back to the bar, where the kind landlady herself ratified all that her husband had promised in her name.

The stars shone brightly as I went home, and there was no moon. The town was intensely silent, and the road intensely solitary. I met no one on my way, let myself quietly in, and stole up to my bedroom in the dark.

It was already late; but I was restless and weary—too restless to sleep, and too weary to read. I could not detach myself from the impressions of the day, and I longed for the morning, that I might get up, and learn the fate of my watch, and the condition of the Chevalier.

At length, after some hours of wakefulness, I dropped, insensibly, into a profound and dreamless sleep.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE CHEVALIER MAKES HIS LAST EXIT.

"All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players :  
They have their exits and their entrances.—"

AS YOU LIKE IT.

I was awakened by my father's voice calling to me from the garden, and so started up with that strange and sudden sense of trouble which we have all experienced at some time or other in our lives.

"Nine o'clock, Stanton," repeated my father. "Nine o'clock,—come down directly, Sir!"

I sprang out of bed, and for some minutes could remember nothing of what had happened; but when I looked out of the window, and saw my father walking up and down the sunny path with his hands behind his back, and his eyes fixed on the ground, it flashed upon me suddenly. To dress, run down, and join him in the garden, was the work of but a few minutes.

"Well, Sir!" I ejaculated, standing beside him, breathless and eager.

He stopped short in his walk, and looked at me from head to foot.

"Humph!" said he; "you have dressed quickly this morning."

"Yes, Sir; I was anxious"——

"So quickly," he returned, "that you have forgotten your watch."

I felt my face burn; I had not a word to answer.

"I suppose," said he, "you thought I should not find it out?"

"I had hoped to recover it first," I replied falteringly; 'but'—

"But you may make up your mind to the loss of it, Sir, and serve you rightly, too," interposed my father. "I can tell you, for your satisfaction, that the man's clothes have been thoroughly examined, and that your watch was not to be found. No doubt it lay somewhere on the table, and was stolen in the confusion."

I hung my head, and could almost have wept with vexation.

My father laughed sardonically. He was always a cruel comforter.

"Well, Master Stanton," he said, "the loss is yours. You paid for the toy, and now you must wait till you can pay for another. You won't get one from me, I promise you."

I retorted angrily, whereat he only laughed the more, and we went in to breakfast.

The meal this morning was even more unsocial than usual. I was too much annoyed to speak, and my father too pre-occupied. I longed to enquire after the Chevalier, but not choosing to break the silence, hurried through my breakfast that I might run round to the Red Lion immediately after. Just as I was about to start a messenger came to say that the conjuror was "taken worse," and so my father and I hastened away together.

He had passed from his trance-like sleep into a state of delirium, and when we entered the room, was sitting up, pale and ghost-like, muttering to himself, and gesticulating as if in the presence of an audience.

"*Pas du tout*," said he, fantastically, "*pas du tout, Messieurs*—here is no deception. You shall see him pass from my hand to the *coffre*, and yet you shall not find how he does travel."

My father smiled bitterly.

"Conjuror to the last!" said he. "In the face of death, what a mockery is his trade!"

Wandering as were his wits, he caught the last word, and turned fiercely round; but there was no recognition in his eye.

"Trade, Monsieur!" he echoed. "Trade—you shall not call him trade! Do you know who I am, that you dare call him trade? *Dieu des Dieux ! N'est ce pas qui je suis noble, moi ? N'est ce pas que j'ai le sang pur ?* Trade!—when did one of my race embrace a trade? *Canaille !* I do condescend for my reasons to take your money, but you shall not call him a trade!"

Exhausted by this sudden burst of passion, he fell back upon his pillow, muttering and flushed. I bent over him, and caught a scattered phrase from time to time. He was dreaming of wealth, fancying himself rich and powerful, poor wretch, and all unconscious of his condition.

"You shall see my Chateaux," he said, "my horses—my carriages. Listen—it is the ringing of the bells. Aha! *le jour viendra—le jour viendra !* Conjuror! who speaks of a conjuror? I never was a conjuror! I deny it; and he lies who dares to breathe it! *Attendez !* Is the curtain up? Ah my table! where is my table? I cannot play till I have my table. *Scélérats ! je suis volé ! je l'ai perdu ! j'ai tout perdu !* Ah, what shall I do? What shall I do? They have taken my table—they have taken——"

He burst into tears, moaned twice or thrice, closed his eyes, and fell into a troubled sleep.

The landlady sobbed. She was a kind soul, and the little Frenchman's simple courtesy had won her good-will from the first.

"He had real quality manners," she said, disconsolately. "I do believe, gentlemen, that he had seen better days. Poor as he was he never disputed the price of anything, and he never spoke to me without taking off his hat!"

"Upon my soul, Mistress Blake," said my father, "I incline to your opinion. I do think he is not what he seems."

"And if I only knew where to find his friends, I shouldn't

care half so much!" exclaimed the landlady. "It do seem so hard that he should die here, and not one of his own blood to follow him to the grave! Surely he has some one who loves him!"

"There was something said the other day about a child," mused my father. "Have no papers or letters been found about his person?"

"None at all. Why, Doctor, you were here last night when we searched for the young gentleman's watch, and you are witness that he had nothing of the kind in his possession. As to his luggage, that's only a carpet bag and his conjuring things, and we looked through them as carefully as possible."

The Chevalier moaned again, and tossed his arms feebly in his sleep.

"The proofs," said he; "the proofs! I can do nothing without the proofs."

My father listened, and the landlady shook her head.

"He has been going on like that ever since you left, Sir," she said pitifully, "fancying he's been robbed, and calling out about the proofs—only ten times more violent. Then, again, he thinks he is going to act, and asks for his table. It's wonderful how he takes on about that trumpery table!"

Scarcely had she spoken the words when the Chevalier opened his eyes, and, by a supreme effort, sat upright in his bed. The cold dew rose upon his brow; his lips quivered, he strove to speak, and only an inarticulate cry found utterance. My father sprang to his support, and enjoined us to silence by a sign.

"If you have anything so say," he cried eagerly, "try to say it now!"

He trembled convulsively, and an expression of utter despair came upon the wan face.

"Tell—tell"——he gasped; but his voice and his strength failed him.

My father laid him gently down. There came an inter-

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val of terrible suspense—a moment of sharp agony—a deep, deep sigh—and then the silence of death.

My father laid his hand gently upon my shoulder.

“It is all over,” he said, “and his secret, if he had one, is in closer keeping than ours. Come away, boy; this is no place for you.”

## CHAPTER VI.

### IN MEMORIAM.

The poor little Chevalier ! He died and became famous.

Births, deaths, and marriages are the great events of a county town, the prime novelties of a country newspaper, the salt of conversation, and the soul of gossip. An individual who furnishes the community with one or other of these topics, is a benefactor to his species. To be born is much ; to marry is more ; to die is to confer a favour on all the old ladies of the neighbourhood. They love a christening, and caudle—they rejoice in a wedding, and cake—but they prefer a funeral, and black kid gloves. It is a tragedy played off at the expense of the few for the gratification of the many—a costly luxury, of which it is pleasanter to be the spectator than the entertainer.

Occurring, therefore, at a season when the supply of news was particularly scanty, the death of the little Chevalier was a very boon to Normandene. The wildest reports were bandied about, and the most extraordinary historic fictions set on foot respecting his origin and station. He was a foreign spy, in disguise. He was the unfortunate son of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette. He was the pupil of Cagliostro, and the husband of Mlle. Le Normand. Customers flocked to the tap of the Red Lion as they had never flocked before, unless during the elections ; and good Mrs Blake had to repeat the story of the conjuror's illness and death till, like many other reciters, she had told it so often that she began to forget it. As for her husband, he had enough to do to serve the customers and take the money, to say nothing of showing the room, which proved to be a very great attraction indeed, and remained for more

than a week just as it was left on the evening of performance, with the table, and canopy, and paraphernalia of wizardom arranged upon the platform.

In the midst of these things arose a momentous question—what was the religion of the deceased, and where should he be buried? As in the old miracle plays we find good and bad angels contending for the soul of the dead, so on this occasion did the heads of all the Normandene churches, chapels, meeting-houses and sects, contend for the body of the little Chevalier. He was a Roman Catholic. He was a Dissenter. He was a member of the Established Church. He must be buried in the new Protestant Cemetery. He must lie in the churchyard of the Ebenezer Tabernacle. He must sleep in the far-away “God’s Acre” of Father Daly’s Chapel, and have a cross at his head, and masses repeated for the repose of his soul. The controversy ran high. The reverend gentlemen convened a meeting, quarrelled outrageously, and separated in high dudgeon without having arrived at any decision.

Whereupon arose another question, melancholy, ludicrous, perplexing, and, withal, as momentous as the first—Would the little Chevalier get buried at all, or was he destined to remain, like Mahomed’s coffin, for ever in a state of suspense?

At the last, when Mr. and Mrs. Blake despairingly believed that they were never to be relieved of their troublesome guest, a vestry was called, and the churchwardens brought the matter to a conclusion. When he went round with his tickets, the conjuror called first at the Rectory, and solicited the patronage of Doctor Brand. Would he have paid that compliment to the cloth had he been other than a member of that religion by “law established?” Certainly not. The point was clear—could not be clearer; and orthodoxy and the new Protestant Cemetery carried the day.

The funeral was a great event, not so far as mutes, feathers, and carriages were concerned, for the Chavalier



left but little worldly gear, and without the wherewithal, even the most deserving must forego "the trappings and the suits of woe," but it was a great event, inasmuch as it had become a controversial matter, and celebrated the victory of the Church and the defeat of all pretenders. The rector himself, complacent and dignified, preached the funeral sermon. Half the inhabitants of Normandene crowded to the spot. We almost forgot, in fact, that it was the funeral of the little Chevalier, and looked upon it only as the triumph of orthodoxy.

All was not ended, even here. For some weeks our conjuror continued to be the hero of every pulpit round about. He was cited as a shining light, denounced as a vessel of wrath, praised, pitied, and calumniated according to the temper and disposition of each orator. At length even this died away, and his reputation was suffered to repose in peace.

Laid to rest in a quiet corner, with a plain stone at his head, and a willow drooping above, the little Frenchman was himself, in course of time, forgotten;—

Alas ! Poor Yorick !"

## CHAPTER VII.

### POLONIUS TO LAERTES.

Time went on, I studied, outgrew my jackets, and became a young man. I was ready, in fact, to visit London, walk the hospitals, and pass my examination.

I had spoken to my father more than once upon the subject—represented to him more than once the propriety and necessity of this step. But he put me off from time to time, persisted in looking upon me as a boy long after I had become acquainted with the penalties of the razor, and counselled me to be patient, till patience was well nigh exhausted. The consequence was that I grew miserable and discontented; spent whole days wandering about the woods; and, after having been all my life, the quietest of book-worms, promised to degenerate into a creature half-idler and half misanthrope. I had never loved the profession of medicine. I had no inborn taste for it, and I should never have chosen it had I been free to take my own path among men; but having diligently studied it having conscientiously fitted myself to enter it with credit, I felt that my father wronged me in this delay, and felt it, I think, all the more bitterly because my labour had been none of love. Had he not seen his mistake in time, I believe I should soon have hated the profession, and refused to enter it. Whether he himself perceived his error, or whether it was pointed out to him by Doctor Brand, I know not; but he loved me well, after his own rough fashion, and repaired it generously before it was too late.

"Stanton," said he, beckoning me one morning into the consulting-room, "I want to speak to you."

I obeyed sullenly, and stood leaning up against the window, with my hands in my pockets.

"You've been worrying me, Stanton, more than enough these last few months," said he, rummaging among his papers, and speaking in a low, constrained voice; "and I don't choose to be worried any longer. It is time you walked the hospitals, and so you may go."

"To London, sir?" I exclaimed, startled out of my indifference.

"No. I don't intend you to go to London."

"To Edinburgh, then, I suppose," said I, in a tone of disappointment.

"No, Stanton; nor yet to Edinburgh; you shall go to Paris."

"To Paris!"

"Yes—the French surgeons are the most skilful in the world, and my friend Lucet has promised to do everything for you. I know no eminent man in London from whom I should choose to ask a favour; and Lucet is one of my oldest friends, nay, the very oldest friend I have in the world. If you have but two ounces of brains he will make a clever man of you. Under him you will study French practice; walk the hospitals of Paris; acquire the language; and, I hope, some of the polish of the French people. Are you satisfied?"

"More than satisfied, Sir," I replied, eagerly.

"You shall not want money, boy; and you may start as soon as you please. Is the thing settled?"

"Quite, as far as I am concerned."

My father rubbed his head all over with both hands, took off his spectacles, and walked up and down the room. By these signs he expressed any unusual degree of satisfaction. All at once he stopped, looked me full in the face, and said:—

"Understand me, Stanton, I require one thing in return."

"If that thing be industry, Sir, I think I may promise that you shall not have cause to complain."

My father shook his head.

"Not industry," he said, meaningly; "not industry. Keep good company, my boy, keep good hours. Never forget that you are a gentleman. If you do all these you are pretty sure to be industrious."

"I—I understand you, father," I faltered, blushing painfully. "I know that of late I—I have not——"

My father laid his hand suddenly over my mouth.

"No confession—no apologies," he said hastily. "We have both been to blame in more respects than one, and we shall both know how to be wiser in the future. Now go, and consider all that you may require for your journey."

Bewildered, agitated, and full of hope, I ran up to my own room, locked the door, and indulged in a delightful reverie. Novelty, adventure, fame, all lay before me like a panorama. I felt as if I must be dreaming, and dreaded the moment of awaking. Paris! Paris;—that city of enchantment, consecrated by so much that was thrilling in history and immortal in art! Paris, the throne of luxury, the patron of science, the centre of refinement and civilisation! To have visited London would have been to fulfil all my desires; but to be sent to Paris was to receive a passport for Fairyland!

Walking to and fro, planning, conjecturing, and excited, I paused before the glass, and felt inclined to disown the image that fronted me back again. Pale, hollow-eyed, unshaven, it seemed impossible that this should be a reflection of myself! From the tangled hair to the careless tie and tumbled linen, all told of wasted hours and sullen self-neglect. Alone in the solitude of my chamber, I blushed for the events of the last four months. I remembered the aspirations of my boyhood, and compared the moral lassitude to which I had yielded, with the hopes and ambitions of my past and my present. Where had been my self-reliance? Where my pride of learning? Whence, but for the awakening of to-day, had tended this path of indolent self-degradation? Alas! I had been very weak.

I wrote out my list of necessaries, put my wardrobe and

books in order, dressed myself carefully, and went down to dinner with a light heart, a cheerful face, and an unexceptionable neckcloth.

As I took my place at the table, my father looked up cheerily and gave me a pleased nod of recognition.

Our meal passed off very silently. It was my father's maxim that no man could do more than one thing well at a time—especially at table ; so we had contracted a habit which to strangers would have seemed even more unsocial than it really was, and gave to all our meals an air more penitential than convivial. But this day was, in reality, a festive occasion, and my father was disposed to be more than usually agreeable. When the cloth was removed he flung the cellar key at my head, and exclaimed, in a burst of unexampled good humour :—

“ Stanton, you dog, fetch up a bottle of the particular port !”

I have observed in life (and I have lived many a year since that day) that a man's after-dinner talk takes much of its weight, colour, and variety from the quality of his wines. A generous vintage brings out generous sentiments. Good fellowship, hospitality, liberal politics, and the milk of human kindness, may be uncorked simultaneously with a bottle of old Madeira ; while a pint of thin Sauterne is productive only of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. We grow sententious on Burgundy—logical on Bordeaux—sentimental on Cyprus—maudlin on *Lacrima Christi*—and witty on Champagne.

Port was my father's favourite wine. It warmed his heart, cooled his temper, and made him not only conversational, but expansive. Leaning back complacently in his easy-chair, with the glass upheld between his eye and the window, he discoursed to me of my journey, of my prospects in life, and of all that I should do and avoid, professionally and morally.

“ Work,” said he, “ is the panacea for every sorrow—the plaister for every pain—the only universal remedy. Indus-

try, air, and exercise are our best physicians. Trust to them, boy ; but don't publish the prescription too freely among your patients. Remember that if you wish to be rich, you must never seem to be poor, and that as soon as you stand in need of your friends you will find yourself without any. Tell the truth always. On no account meet falsehood with prevarication. Hold your tongue as long as you please, but never open your lips to utter a lie. Show no man the contents of your purse—he would either despise you for having so little, or try to relieve you of the burden of carrying so much. Above all, never get into debt, and never fall in love. The first is disgrace, and the last is the devil ! Respect yourself if you wish others to respect you ; and bear in mind that the world takes you at your own estimate. The man who neglects his own appearance not only degrades himself to the level of his inferiors, but puts an affront upon his friends and acquaintances."

" I trust, Sir," I said in confusion, " that I shall never incur the last reproach again."

" I hope not, Stanton," replied my father, with a smile. " I hope not. Keep your conscience clean, and your boots blackened, and I have no fear of you. You are no hero, my boy, but it depends upon yourself whether you become a man of honour or a scamp ; a gentleman or a clown. You have, I see, registered a good resolution to-day. Keep it ; keep it, and remember that Pandemonium will get paved without your help. There would be no industry, boy, if there were no idleness, and all true progress commences with—Reform."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AT THE CHEVAL BLANC.

My journey, even at this distance of time, appears to me like a dream. I observed, yet scarcely remembered, the scenes through which I passed, so divided was I between the novelty of travelling and the eagerness of anticipation. Possessed of my letters of introduction, the sum of one hundred guineas English, and the enthusiasm of twenty years of age, I fancied myself endowed with an immortality of wealth and happiness, and took slight heed of time or place.

The Brighton coach passed through our town once a week ; so I started for Paris without having ever visited London, and took the route by Newhaven and Dieppe. Having left home on Tuesday morning, I reached Rouen in the course of the following day. At Rouen I paused to dine and sleep, and so made my way to the *Cheval Blanc*, a grand hotel on the quay, where I was received by an aristocratic elderly waiter, with a ring, and a massive gold watch-chain, who sauntered out from a side office, surveyed me patronisingly, entered my name upon a card for a seat at the *table d'hôte*, and, having rung a feeble little bell, sank exhausted upon a seat in the hall.

"To number seventeen, Marie," said this majestic personage, handing me over to a pretty little chamber-maid who attended the summons ; "and Marie, on thy return, my child, bring me an absinthe.

We left this gentleman in a condition of ostentatious languor, and Marie deposited me in a pretty room overlooking an exquisite little garden, set round with beds of verbena and scarlet geranium, with a fountain sparkling

in the midst. This garden filled the central court of the building. The trees nodded and whispered, and the windows at the opposite side of the quadrangle shone like burnished gold in the warm sunlight. I threw open the jalousies, plucked one of the white roses that clustered outside, and congratulated myself on this new delicious liberty,—on the deep blue sky above me, on the warm—clear air—on the atmosphere and aroma of continual life that seemed to inform the very breeze that played among the leaves, and scattered the waters of the fountain. I could not long rest thus, however. I longed to be out and about, drinking in delight from every sight and sound; so, as it was now no more than half-past three o'clock, and two good hours of the glorious midsummer afternoon yet remained to me before the hotel dinner, I took my hat, and went out along the quays and streets of the beautiful Norman city. Under crumbling archways; past quaint old mansions; through narrow alleys, where the upper storeys nearly met overhead, leaving only a bright strip of dazzling sky; I wandered, wondering and unwearied. I saw the statue of Joan d'Arc; the chateau of Diane de Poitiers, the archway carved in oak where the founder of the city still, in rude effigy, presides; the museum rich in mediæval relics; the market-place crowded with fruit and flowers-girls in their high Norman caps; and, above all, the rare old Gothic Cathedral, with its wondrous wealth of antique sculpture, its iron spire, destined, despite its traceried beauty, to everlasting incompleteness, its grass-grown buttresses, and crumbling pinnacles, and portals crowded with saints and kings in solemn stone procession. I went in. It was grey, shadowy, and vast, dusky with the rich gloom of painted windows, and so silent that I scarcely dared disturb the echoes with my footsteps. There was a triangular stand of votive tapers flickering and sputtering in one corner, and a very old peasant woman on her knees before the altar. I sat down on a stone bench, and fell into a musing contemplation of the stained oriel,



and the long perspective of the pillared aisles. Presently the verger came out of the vestry-room, followed by a couple of gentlemen. He was short, and plump, with a loose black gown, slender black legs, and a pointed nose—like a larger species of raven.

“*Bon jour, M’sieur,*” croaked he, laying his head a little on one side, and surveying me with one glittering eye. “Will M’sieur be pleased to see the treasury?”

“The treasury!” I repeated. “What is there to see in it?”

“Nothing, sir, worth one sou of an Englishman’s money,” said the taller of the gentlemen. “Tinsel and paste, and dusty bones—all humbug and extortion.”

Something in the scornful accent and the deep voice aroused the suspicions of the verger, though the words were spoken in English.

“Our treasury, M’sieur,” croaked he, more ravenly than ever, “is rich—rich in episcopal jewels—in relics, inestimable relics. Tickets two francs each.”

Warned, however, by the timely caution, I acknowledged my countryman’s courtesy by a bow, declined the proffered investment, and went out again into the sunny streets.

At five o’clock I found myself installed near the head of an immensely long dinner-table in the *salle à manger* of the Cheval Blanc. The *salle à manger* was a magnificent temple, radiant with mirrors, and lustres, and panels painted in fresco. The dinner was an imposing rite, served with solemn ceremonies by ministering waiters. There were about thirty guests seated round, in august silence, most of them very finely dressed, and nearly all English. A stout gentleman, with a little knob on the top of his bald head, a buff waistcoat, and a shirt amply frilled, sat opposite to me, flanked on either side by an elderly daughter in green silk. To my left I was supported by a thin young gentleman with fair hair, and blue glasses. To my right stood a vacant chair, the occupant of which had not yet arrived; and at the head of the table sat a spare

pale man dressed all in black, who spoke to no one, kept his eyes fixed upon his plate, and was served by the waiters with especial servility. The soup came and went in profound silence. Faint whispers passed to and fro with the fish. It was not till the roast made its appearance that anything like conversation broke the sacred silence of the meal. At this point the owner of the vacant chair arrived, and took his place beside me. I recognised him immediately. It was the Englishman whom I had met in the Cathedral. We bowed, and by and by fell into conversation. In the meantime, he had every foregone item of the dinner served to him as exactly as if he had not been late at table, and sipped his soup with perfect coolness, and deliberation, while others were busy with the *entrées*. Our conversation began, of course, with the weather and the place.

"Your first visit to Rouen, I suppose," said he. "Beautiful old city, is it not? *Garçon* a bottle of Bordeaux—Leoville!"

I modestly admitted that it was not only my first visit to Rouen, but my first to the Continent.

"Ah, you may go farther than Rouen, and fare worse," said he "Do you sketch? No? That's a pity, for it's gloriously picturesque—though, for my own part, I am not enthusiastic about gutters and gables, and object to a population composed exclusively of old women. I'm glad, by the way, that I preserved you from wasting your time among the atrocious lumber of that so-called treasury."

"The treasury!" exclaimed my slim neighbour with the blue glasses. "Beg your p—p—pardon, sir, but were you speaking of the Cathedral treasury? Is it worth v—v—visiting?"

"Singularity so," replied he to my right. "One of the rarest collections of authentic curiosities in France. They have the snuff-box of Clovis, the great toe of Saint Helena, and the tongs with which St. Dunstan took the devil by the nose."

"Up p—pon my word, now, that's curious," ejaculated the thin tourist, who had an impediment in his speech. "I must p—p—put that down. Dear me! the snuff-box of King Clovis! I will go and see them to-morrow."

"Be sure you ask for the great toe of St. Helena," said my right hand companion, proceeding imperturbably with his dinner. "The saint had but one leg at the period of her martyrdom, and that great toe is unique."

"G—g—good gracious!" exclaimed the tourist, pulling out a gigantic note-book, and entering the fact upon the spot.—"A saint with one leg, and a lady, too! wouldn't m—m—miss that for the world!"

I looked round for some solution of the mystery.

"Is this all true?" I whispered, utterly misled by the gravity of my new acquaintance. "You told me the treasury was a humbug!"

"And so it is."

"But the snuff-box of Clovis, and....."

"Pure inventions, every one! That man's a muff, and on muffs I have no mercy. Do you stay long in Rouen?"

"No, I go on to Paris to-morrow. I wish I could remain longer."

"I am not sure that you would gain more from a long visit than from a short one. Some places are like some women, charming to look upon, but intolerable upon close acquaintance. This is the case with Rouen. It contains no fine galleries, and no places of public entertainments; and though exquisitely picturesque, is nothing more. One cannot always be looking at old houses, and admiring old churches! You will be delighted with Paris."

"B—b—beautiful city," interposed the stammerer, eager to join our conversation, whenever he could catch a word of it. "I'm going to P—P—Paris myself."

"Then, sir, I have no doubt that you will do ample justice to its attractions," observed my right hand neighbour. "From the size of your note-book, and the industry with which you accumulate useful information, I should

presume that you are a conscientious observer of all that is recondite and curious."

"I b—b—believe you are right," replied the other, with a blush and a bow. "I m—m—mean to exhaust P—P—Paris. I'm going to write a b—b—book about it, when I get home."

My friend to the right flashed one glance of silent scorn upon the future author, drained the last glass of his Bordeaux Leoville, pushed his chair impatiently back, and said:—

"This place smells like a kitchen, will you come out, and have a cigar?" I rose gladly, we took our hats, and in a few moment were strolling under the lindens on the Quai de Corneille.

I had never smoked in my life, and, humiliating though it was, found myself obliged to decline the "prime Havana" proffered to me out of the daintiest of embroidered cigar cases. My companion looked as if he pitied me.

"You'll soon learn," said he. "A man can't live in Paris without tobacco. Do you propose to stay there many weeks?"

"Two years at the least," I replied, registering an inward resolution to conquer the difficulties of tobacco without delay. "I am going to study medicine, and walk the hospitals, under an eminent French surgeon."

"Indeed! Well, you could not go to a better school, or embrace a nobler profession. I used to think a soldier's life the grandest under heaven; but, upon my soul, curing is a finer thing than killing, after all! What a delicious evening, is it not? If one were only in Paris, or Vienna, now,....."

"What, Harold Oliphant!" exclaimed a voice close beside us. "I should as soon have expected to meet the great Panjandrum himself!"

"— With the little round button at top," added my companion, tossing away the end of his cigar, and shaking hands heartily with the new-comer. "By Jove, Frank,

I'm glad to see you ! What brings you here ?”

“ Business—confound it ! and not pleasant business either. A *procès* which my father has instituted against a great manufacturing firm here at Rouen, and of which I have to bear all the brunt. And you ?”

“ And I, my dear fellow ? Pshaw, what should I be but an idler in search of amusement ?”

“ Is it true that you have really sold out of the Enniskillens ?”

“ Most unquestionably. Liberty is sweet ; and who cares to carry a sword in time of peace ? Not I, at all events.”

While this brief greeting was going forward, I hung somewhat in the rear and amused myself by comparing the speakers. The new-comer was rather below than above the middle-height, fair-haired and boyish, with a smile full of mirth, and an eye full of mischief. He looked about two years my senior. The other was much older—two or three-and-thirty, at the least—dark, tall, powerful, and finely built, with a profusion of curling hair, cut somewhat closely round his sun-burnt neck, a thick moustache of unusual length, and a chest that looked as if it would have withstood the shock of a battering-ram. Without being at all handsome, there was something active in the expression of his dark face, and something in the contour of his head that arrested one's attention at first sight. I think I should have guessed him for a soldier, had I not already gathered it from the last words of their conversation.

“ Who is your friend ?” I heard the new-comer whisper.

To which mine replied, “ Know no more than yourself ; but I'll enquire.”

With this he took out his pocket-book, and, handing me a card, said :—

“ We are under the mutual disadvantage of all chance acquaintances. My name is Oliphant, Harold Oliphant, late of the Enniskillen Dragoons. My friend here is un-

known to fame as Mr. Frank Sotherby, a young gentleman who has the good-fortune to be younger partner in a firm of merchant princes, and the bad taste to dislike his occupation."

How I blushed as I took Captain Oliphant's card, and stammered out my own name in return ! I had never possessed such a thing as a card in my life, or needed one, till this moment. I rather think that Captain Oliphant guessed these facts, for he shook hands with me at once, and put an end to my embarrassment by proposing that we should take a boat, and pull a mile or two up the river. The thing was no sooner said than done. There were plenty of boats below the iron bridge, so we chose one of the cleanest, and jumped into it without any kind of reference to the owner, whoever he might be.

"*Batelier, Messieurs ? Batelier ?*" cried a dozen men at once, rushing down to the water's edge.

But Oliphant had already thrown off his coat, and seized the oars.

"*Batelier, indeed !*" laughed he, as with two or three powerful strokes he carried us right into the middle of the stream. "Trust an Oxford man for employing any arms but his own, when a pair of sculls are in question !"

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE ISLAND IN THE RIVER.

It was just eight o'clock when we started, and verging fast on twilight. Our course lay up the river, with a strong current setting against us, so we proceeded slowly, and enjoyed the tranquil beauty of the evening. The sky was pale and clear, somewhat greenish overhead, and deepening along the line of the horizon into amber and rose. Behind us lay the town with every brown spire articulated against the sky, and every vane glittering in the last glow streaming upward from the east. Here and there a lamp shone out like a tiny star, and the forges near the quays shot a broad glare across the river. To our left rose a line of steep chalk cliffs, and before us lay the river, winding away through a vale of meadow lands, fringed with willows and poplars, and interspersed with green islands wooded to the water's edge. Presently the last flush faded, and one large planet, splendid and solitary, like the first poet of a dark century, emerged from the deepening grey.

My companions were gay, and their gaiety jarred upon me. I longed to be alone with the solemn twilight and the rushing river; free to think—free to feel—free to dream the idle dreams of youth, and weave romances to the music of the ripples. But mirth is infectious, and my graver mood soon melted. They jested, they laughed, they hummed scraps of songs, and had a greeting for every boat that passed, freighted with peasant girls and rustics. By and by, we came to an island, with a little landing-place where a score or two of boats were moored against the alders by the water's edge. A tall flag-staff, gaily

decorated, rose above the trees with which it was thickly wooded, and sounds of music, mingled with a hum of many voices, came and went with the passing of the breeze. As Oliphant rested on his oars to listen, a boat which we had outstripped some minutes before, shot past us to the landing place, and its occupants, five in number, alighted.

"Bet you ten to one that yonder's a bridal party," said Mr. Sotherby.

"The white bows tell that—by your favour," replied his friend. "Suppose we land, too, and have a closer view of the bride! The place is a public garden."

The proposition was carried unanimously, and we landed, having first tied the boat to a willow. We found the island laid out like a shrubbery, and intersected by numbers of little paths, with rustic seats here and there, and variegated lamps gleaming out amid the grass, like parti-coloured glow-worms. Following one of these paths, we came presently to an open space, brilliantly lighted, and crowded by holiday-makers. Here were refreshment stalls, and Russian swings, and queer-looking merry-go-rounds, where each individual sat on a wooden horse and went gravely round and round with a stick in his hand, trying to knock off a ring from the top of a pole in the middle. Here, also, was a band in a gaily decorated orchestra; and a circular area roped off for dancers; and a mysterious tent with a fortune-teller inside; and a lottery-stall resplendent with vases and nick-nacks, which nobody was ever known to win; and, in short, all kinds of attractions, stale and commonplace enough to my companions, no doubt, but sufficiently novel and amusing to me.

We strolled about for some time among the stalls and promenaders, and amused ourselves by criticising the company, which consisted chiefly of peasants, soldiers, artisans in blue blouses, and humble tradespeople. The younger women were mostly handsome, with high lace Norman caps, white kerchiefs, and massive gold ear-rings. Many, in addition to the earrings, wore a gold cross suspended



round their necks by a piece of black velvet, and some a brooch to match. Here at a table under a tree, sat a little plump, bald-headed *bourgeois* with his wife and two children—the wife stout and rosy; the children noisy and authoritative. They were discussing a dish of poached eggs and a bottle of red wine, to the music of a polka close by.

“I should like to dance,” said the little girl, drumming with her feet against the leg of the table, and eating an egg with her fingers. “I may dance presently with Philippe, may I not, Papa?”

“I won’t dance,” said Philippe sulkily. “I want some oysters.”

“Oysters, *mon enfant* ! I have told you twice already that no one eats oysters in July,” observed his mother.

“I don’t care for that,” said Philippe. “It’s my *fête* day, and Uncle Jacques said I was to have whatever I fancied;—I want some oysters.”

“Your uncle Jacques did not know what an unreasonable boy you’d be, or he would never have said so,” replied the father angrily. If you say another word about the oysters, you shall not ride in the *manège* to-night.

Philippe thrust his fists into his eyes and began to roar—so we walked away.

In an arbour, a little farther on, we saw two young people whispering so earnestly that they observed nothing which was taking place around them.”

“A pair of lovers?”—said Sotherby.

“And a pair which seldom get the chance of meeting, to judge by their untasted omelette,” replied Oliphant. “But where’s the bridal party?”

“Oh, we shall find them presently. You seem interested?”

“I am. I mean to dance with the bride, and make the bridegroom jealous.”

We laughed, and passed on, peeping into every arbour, observing every group, and turning to stare into the eyes

of every pretty girl we met. My own aptitude in the acquisition of these acts of gallantry astonished myself. Now, we passed a couple of soldiers playing at dominoes ; now a noisy party round a table in the open air covered with bottles ; now an arbour where half a dozen young men and three or four girls were assembled round a bowl of blazing punch. The girls were protesting they dared not drink it ; but were drinking it, nevertheless, with exceeding gusto.

“Grisettes and commercial travellers !” said Oliphant, contemptuously, “Let us go and look at the dancers.”

We went on, and stood in the shelter of some trees near the orchestra. The players consisted of three violins, a clarionette, and a big drum. The big drum was the most enthusiastic of performers. He belaboured his instrument as heartily as if it had been his worst enemy, but with so much independence of character that he never kept the same time as his fellow-players for two minutes together. They were playing a polka for the benefit of some twelve or fifteen couples, who were dancing with all their might in the space before the orchestra. On they came, round and round and never weary, two at a time—a mechanic and a grisette, a rustic and a Normandy girl, a tall soldier and a short widow, a fat tradesman and his wife, a couple of milliners’ assistants, who preferred dancing together to not dancing at all, and so forth.

“How I wish somebody would ask me, *ma mère* !” said a coquettish brunette, close by, with a sidelong glance at ourselves.

“You shall dance with your brother Paul, my dear, as soon as he comes,” replied her mother, a stout *bourgeoise* with a green fan.

“But it is such dull work to dance with one’s brother ;” pouted the brunette. “If it were one’s cousin, even, it would be different.”

Mr. Frank Sotherby flung away his cigar, and began buttoning up his gloves.

"I shall take that damsel out immediately," said he; "a girl who objects to dance with her brother deserves encouragement."

So away he went with his hat inclining jauntily on one side, and having obtained the mother's permission, whirled away with the pretty brunette into the very thickest of the throng.

"There they are!" said Oliphant suddenly. "There's the wedding party, *Per Bacco!* but our little bride is charming!"

"And the bridegroom is a handsome specimen of rusticity."

"Yes—a genuine pastoral pair, like a shepherd and shepherdess of Dresden china! See, the girl is looking up in his face—he shakes his head. She is urging him to dance, depend on it, and he refuses! Never mind, *ma belle*, you shall have your valse, and Corydon may be as cross as he pleases!"

"Don't flatter yourself that she will displease Corydon to dance with your lordship!" I said laughingly.

"Pshaw! she would displease fifty Corydons if I chose to make her do so," said Oliphant, with a smile of conscious power.

"True; but not on her wedding day!"

"Wedding day or not, I beg to observe that in less than half an hour you will see me whirling along with my arm round little Phillis's dainty waist," said he. "Now come, and see how I do it."

He made his way through the crowd, and I, half curious, half abashed, went with him. The party was five in number, consisting of the bride and bridegroom; a rosy middle-aged peasant woman, evidently the mother of the bride; and an elderly couple who looked like humble townsfolk, and were probably related to one or other of the newly married pair. Oliphant opened the attack by brushing somewhat heavily against the mother, and then overwhelming her with elaborate apologies.

"In these crowded places, Madame," said he, in his fluent French, "one is scarcely responsible for an impoliteness. I beg ten thousand pardons, however. I hope I have not hurt you?"

"*Ma foi!* no, M'sieur. It would take more than that to hurt me!"

"Nor injured your dress, I trust, Madame?"

"Ah, *par exemple!* do I wear muslins or gauzes, that they should not bear touching? No, no, no, M'sieur—thanking you all the same."

"You are very good-natured, Madame, to say so."

"You are very polite, M'sieur, to think so much of a trifle."

"Nothing is a trifle, Madame, where a lady is concerned. At least, so we Englishmen consider."

"Bah! M'sieur is not English?"

"Indeed, Madame, I am."

"*Mais, mon Dieu, c'est incroyable!* Suzette—brother Jacques—Andre, do you hear this? M'sieur, here, swears that he is English, and yet he speaks French like one of ourselves! Ah, what a fine thing learning is!"

"I may say with truth, Madame, that I never appreciate the advantages of education so highly, as when they enable me to converse with ladies who are not my own countrywomen," said Oliphant, carrying on the conversation with as much studied politeness as if his interlocutor had been a duchess. "But—excuse the observation—you are here, I imagine, upon a happy occasion?"

The mother laughed, and rubbed her hands. "Ah, bah! one may see that," replied she, "with one's eyes shut! Yes, M'sieur,—yes—their wedding day, the dear children—their wedding day! They've been betrothed these two years."

"The bride is very like you, Madame," said Oliphant, gravely. "Your younger sister, I presume?"

"Ah, *quel farceur!* He takes my daughter for my sister! *Comme il est drôle.* Suzette, do you hear this? M'sieur is killing me with laughter!"

And the good lady laughed, and gasped, and wiped her eyes, and dealt Oliphant a playful push between the shoulders, which would have upset the balance of any less heavy dragoon.

"Your daughter, Madame!" said he. "Allow me to congratulate you. May I also be permitted to congratulate the bride?"

And with this he took off his hat to Suzette, and shook hands with Andre, who looked not overpleased, and proceeded to introduce me as his friend Monsieur Stanton Leigh, "a young English gentleman, *très distingué*."

The old lady then said that her name was Madame Roquet, and that she kept a small farm about a mile and a half from Rouen—that Suzette was her only child, and that she had lost her "blessed man" about eight years ago. She next introduced the elderly couple as her brother Jacques Robineau and his wife, and informed us that Jacques was a tailor, and had a shop opposite the church of St Maclore, "*là bas*."

To judge of Monsieur Robineau's skill by his outward appearance, I should have said that he was professionally unsuccessful, and supplied his own wardrobe from the misfits returned by his customers. He wore a waistcoat which was considerably too long for him, and trousers which were considerably too short, and a green cloth coat with a high velvet collar which came up nearly to the tops of his ears. In respect of personal characteristics, Monsieur Robineau and his wife were the most complete contrast imaginable. Monsieur Robineau was short; Madame Robineau was tall. Monsieur Robineau was as plump and rosy as a robin; Madame Robineau was pale and bony to behold. Monsieur Robineau looked the soul of good nature, ready to chirrup over his *grog-au-vin*, to smoke a pipe with his neighbour, to cut a harmless joke, or enjoy a harmless frolic, as cheerfully as any little tailor that ever lived; Madame Robineau, on the contrary, preserved a dreadful dignity—that kind of dignity which always

makes the possessors of it so exceedingly ill-tempered, and disagreeable—and looked as if she could laugh at nothing on this side of the grave. Not to consider the question too curiously, I should have said, at first sight, that Monsieur Robineau stood in no little awe of his wife, and that Madame Robineau was the very head and front of their domestic establishment.

It was wonderful and delightful to see how Captain Oliphant placed himself on the best of terms with all these good people—how he patted Robineau on the back, and complimented Madame, banished the cloud from Andre's brow, and summoned a smile to the pretty cheek of Suzette. One would have thought that he had known them for years already, so thoroughly did he seem to understand their various moods and weaknesses.

Presently, he asked Suzette to dance. She blushed scarlet—was it from pleasure, I wonder?—and cast a pretty appealing look at her husband and her mother. I could almost guess what she whispered to the former by the motion of her lips.

“Monsieur Andre will, I am sure, spare Madame for one galop,” said Oliphant, with that kind of courtesy which accepts no denial. It was quite another tone, quite another manner. It was no longer the persuasive suavity of one who is desirous only to please, but the politeness of a gentleman to an inferior.

The cloud came back upon Andre's brow, and he hesitated; but Madame Roquet interposed.

“Spare her!” she exclaimed. “*Dame*! I should think he could! She has never left his arm all day. Here, my child, give me your shawl while you dance, and take care not to get too warm, for the night air is dangerous.”

And so Suzette took off her shawl, and Andre was silenced, and Oliphant, in less than the half hour, was actually whirling away with his arm round little Phillis's dainty waist.

I am afraid that I proved a very indifferent *locum tenens*

for my brilliant friend, and that the good people must have thought me exceedingly stupid. I tried to talk to them, but the language tripped me up sadly, and the right words never would come when they were wanted. Besides, I felt uneasy, without knowing why. I could not keep my eyes away from Oliphant and Suzette. I could not help noticing how closely he held her ; how he was always talking to her ; how, when they paused to rest, it was never within reach or hearing of us ; and how the smiles and blushes chased each other over her pretty face. That I should have had even observation enough to see these things, amazed me afterwards, when I came to think over the events of the evening. My education must have been progressing with marvellous rapidity. But, then, to be sure, I was under an accomplished teacher.

They danced for a long time. So long, that Andre became uneasy, and my available French was quite exhausted. I was heartily glad when Oliphant brought back the little bride at last, flushed and panting, and, himself as cool as a diplomatist, assisted her with her shawl, and resigned her to the protection of her husband.

"Why hast thou danced so long with that big Englishman?" murmured Andre, discontentedly. "When I asked thee thou wast too tired, and now....."

"And now I am so happy to be near thee again," whispered Suzette.

Andre softened directly.

"But to dance for twenty minutes....." began he.

"Ah, but he danced so well, and I am so fond of it, Andre!"

The cloud gathered again, and an impatient reply was coming, when Oliphant opportunely invited the whole party to a bowl of punch in an adjoining arbour, and himself led the way with Madame Roquet. The arbour was vacant, a waiter was placing the chairs, and the punch was blazing in the bowl. It had evidently been ordered, during one of the pauses in the dance, that it might be

ready to the moment—a little attention which called forth exclamations of pleasure from both Madame Roquet and Monsieur Robineau, and touched with something like a gleam of satisfaction even the grim visage of Monsieur Robineau's wife.

Oliphant took the head of the table, and stirred the punch into leaping tongues of blue flame, till it looked like a miniature Vesuvius.

"What diabolical-looking stuff!" I exclaimed. "You might, to all appearance, be Lucifer's own cupbearer."

"Which is only one more proof that it's devilish good," replied Oliphant, ladling it out into the glasses. "Allow-me, ladies and gentlemen, to propose the health, happiness, and prosperity of the bride and bridegroom. May they never die, and may they be remembered for ever after!"

We all laughed, as if this were the best joke we had heard in our lives, and Oliphant filled the glasses up again.

"What, in the name of all that's mischievous, can have become of Sotherby?" said he aside to me. "I have not caught so much as a glimpse of him for the last hour, or more."

"Nor I. When I last saw him, he was dancing."

"Yes, with a pretty, little dark-eyed girl in a blue dress. By Jove that fellow, will be getting into trouble if left to himself! I know him of old."

"But the girl has her mother with her!"

"All the stronger probability of a row," replied Oliphant, sipping his punch, with a covert glance of salutation at Suzette.

"Well, shall I see if they are among the dancers?"

"Do; but make haste; for the punch is disappearing fast."

I left them, and went back to the platform, where the indefatigable public was now engaged in the performance of quadrilles. Never, surely, were people so industrious



in the pursuit of pleasure ! They *chassèd* they *poussetted*, they bowed, curtsied, joined hands, and threaded the mysteries of every figure, as if their very lives depended on their agility.

“ Look at Jean Thomas,” said a young girl to her still younger companion. “ He dances like an angel !”

The one thus called upon to admire, looked at Jean Thomas, and sighed.

“ He never asks me, by any chance,” said she, sadly, “ although his mother and mine are good neighbours. I suppose I don’t dance well enough—or dress well enough,” she added, glancing at her friend’s gay shawl and coquettish cap.

“ He has danced with me twice this evening,” said the first speaker triumphantly ; “ and he danced with me twice last Sunday at the Jardin d’Armide. Elise says——”

Her voice dropped to a whisper, and I heard no more. It was a passing glimpse behind the curtain—a peep at one of the many dramas of real life that are being played for ever around us. Here were all the elements of romance, love, admiration, vanity, and envy. Here was a hero in humble life and a lady killer in his own little sphere. He dances with one ; he neglects another ; and counts his conquests off upon his fingers, with all the heartlessness of a gentleman. Heaven help thee, Jean Thomas, for power is a dangerous gift !

I wandered round the platform once or twice, scrutinising all the dancers, but without success. There was no sign of Sotherby, or of his partner, or of his partner’s mother, the *bourgeoise* with the green fan. I then went to the grotto of the fortune-teller ; but it was full of noisy rustics—and then to the lottery hall, where there were plenty of players but not those of whom I was in search.

“ Wheel of fortune, Messieurs et Mesdames,” said the young lady behind the counter. “ Only fifty centimes each. All prizes, and no blanks—try your fortune, *mon-sieur le capitaine* ? Put in once, *monsieur le capitaine* ; once

for yourself, and once for madame. Only fifty centimes each and the certainty of winning !”

*Monsieur le capitaine* was a great, raw-boned corporal with a pretty, little maid-servant on his arm. The flattery was not very delicate ; but it succeeded. He threw down a franc. The wheel flew round, the papers were drawn, and the corporal won a needle-case, and the maid-servant a rattle. In the midst of the laugh to which this distribution gave rise, I walked away in the direction of the refreshment stalls. Here were parties supping substantially ; dancers drinking orgeat and lemonade ; and little knots of tradesmen and mechanics sipping beer ridiculously out of wine-glasses to an accompaniment of cakes and sweet-biscuits. Still I could see no trace of Mr. Frank Sotherby ; so I gave up the search in despair, and, on my way back, encountered Master Philippe leaning against a tree, and looking exceedingly helpless and unwell.

“ You ate too many eggs, Philippe,” said his mother. “ I told you so at the time.”

“ It—it wasn’t the eggs,” faltered the wretched Philippe. “ It was the Russian swing.”

“ And serve you rightly too, sir,” said his father angrily. “ I wish with all my heart that you had had your favourite oysters as well !”

When I came back to the harbour, I found the little party immensely happy, and a fresh bowl of punch just placed upon the table. Andre was sitting next to Suzette, as proud as a king. Madame Roquet, volubly convivial, was talking to every one ; Madame Robineau was silently disposing of all the biscuits and punch that came in her way ; Monsieur Robineau, with his hat a little pushed back and his thumb in the arm-hole of his waistcoat, was telling a long story to which nobody listened ; and Oliphant, sitting on the other side of the bride, was gallantly doing the duties of entertainer.

He looked up—I shook my head, slipped into my vacated seat, and listened to the tangled threads of conversation going on around me.

"And so," said Monsieur Robineau, proceeding with his story, and staring down into the bottom of his empty glass, "and so I said to myself, 'Robineau, *mon ami*, take care. One honest man is better than two rogues; and if thou keepest thine eyes open, the devil himself stands small chance of cheating thee! So I buttoned up my coat—this very coat I have on now, only that I have re-lined and re-cuffed it since then, and changed the buttons for brass one; and brass buttons for one's holiday coat, you know, look so much more *comme il faut*—and I said to the landlord——"

"Another glass of punch," Monsieur Robineau, interrupted Oliphant.

"Thank you M'sieur, you are very good; well, as I was saying——"

"Ah, bah, brother Jacques!" exclaimed Madame Roquet impatiently, "don't give us that old story of the miller and the grey colt this evening! We've all heard it a hundred times already. Sing us a song, instead, *mon ami*!"

"I shall be happy to sing, sister Marie," replied Monsieur Robineau, with somewhat husky dignity, "when I have finished my story. You may have heard the story before. So may André—so may Suzette—so may my wife. I admit it. But these gentlemen—these gentlemen who have never heard it, and who have done me the honour——"

"Not to listen to a word of it," said Madame Robineau, sharply "There, you are answered, husband. Drink your punch, and hold your tongue."

Monsieur Robineau waved his hand majestically, and assumed quite a Parliamentary air.

"Madame Robineau," said he, getting more and more husky, "be so obliging as to wait till I ask for your advice. With regard to drinking my punch, I have drunk it"—and here he again stared down into the bottom of his glass, which was again empty—"and with regard to holding my tongue, that is my business, and—and——"

"Monsieur Robineau," said Oliphant, "allow me to offer you some more punch."

"Not another drop, Jacques," said Madame sternly. "You have had too much already."

Poor Monsieur Robineau, who had put out his glass to be re-filled, paused and looked up helplessly at his wife.

"*Ma chère ange*,"—he began; but she shook her head inflexibly, and Monsieur Robineau submitted with the expression of a man who knows that from the sentence of the supreme court there is no appeal.

"*Dame !*" whispered Madame Roquet, with a confidential attack upon my ribs that gave me a pain in my side for half an hour after, "my brother, has the heart of a rabbit. He gives way to her in everything—so much the worse for him. My blessed man, who was a saint of a husband, would have broken the bowl over my ears, if I had dared to interfere between his glass and his mouth!"

Whereupon Madame Roquet filled her own glass and mine, and Madame Robineau, less indulgent to her husband than herself, followed our example.

Just at this moment, a confused hubbub of voices, and other sounds expressive of a *fracas*, broke out in the direction of the trees behind the orchestra. The dancers deserted their polka, the musicians stopped fiddling, the noisy supper-party in the next harbour abandoned their cold fowl and salad, and everybody ran to the scene of action. Oliphant was on his feet in a moment; but Suzette held André back with both hands, and implored him to stay.

"Some *mauvais sujets*, no doubt, who refused to pay the score," suggested Madame Roquet.

"Or Sotherby, who has got into one of his infernal scrapes," muttered Oliphant with a determined wrench at his moustache. "Come on, any how, and let us see what it is about?"

So we snatched up our hats and ran out, just as Monsieur Robineau seized the opportunity to drink another tumbler of punch when his wife was not looking.

Guided by the sounds and by the direction in which others were running, we took one of the paths behind the orchestra, and came upon a noisy crowd gathered round a wooden summer-house.

"It's a fight," said one.

"It's a pickpocket, said another."

"Bah, it's only a young fellow who has been making love to a girl," exclaimed a third.

"We forced our way through, and there we saw Mr. Frank Sotherby, with his hat off, his arms crossed, and his back against the wall, presenting a dauntless front to the gesticulations and threats of an exceedingly enraged young man with red hair, who was abusing him furiously. The amount of temper displayed by this young man was something unparalleled. He was angry in every one of his limbs. He stamped, he shook his fists, he shook his head. The very tips of his ears looked scarlet with rage. Every now and then he faced round to the spectators, and appealed to them—or to a stout woman with a green fan, who was almost as red and angry as himself, and who always rushed forward when addressed, and shook the green fan in Sotherby's face.

"You are an aristocrat!" stormed the young man, "a pampered, insolent, aristocrat! A dog of an Englishman! A *scelerat*! Don't suppose you are to trample upon us for nothing! We are Frenchmen, you beggarly islander—Frenchmen! do you hear?"

A growl of sympathetic indignation ran through the crowd, and "*à bas les aristocrates—à bas les Anglais!*" broke out here and there.

"In the devil's name, Sotherby," said Oliphant, shouldering his way up to the object of these agreeable menaces, "what have you been after, to bring this storm about your ears?"

"Pshaw, nothing at all," replied he with a mocking laugh, and a contemptuous gesture. "I danced with a pretty girl, and treated her to champagne afterwards. Her

another and brother hunted us out, and spoiled our flirtation. That's the whole story."

Something in the laugh and gesture—something, too, perhaps in the language which they could not understand, appeared to give the last aggravation to both of Sotherby's assailants. I saw the young man raise his arm to strike—I saw Oliphant fell him with a blow that would have stunned an ox—I saw the crowd close in, heard the storm break out on every side, and, above it all, the deep, strong tones of Oliphant's voice saying—

"To the boat, boys! Follow me."

In another moment he had flung himself into the crowd, dealt one or two sounding blows to left and right, cleared a passage for himself and us, and sped away down some of the narrow walks leading to the river. Presently, having taken one or two turnings, none of which seemed to lead to the spot we sought, we came to an open space full of piled-up benches, pyramids of empty bottles, boxes, baskets, and all kinds of lumber. Here we paused to listen and take breath.

We had left the crowd behind us, but within hearing still.

"By Jove," said Oliphant, "I don't know which way to go. I believe we are on the wrong side of the island!"

"And I believe they are after us," added Sotherby, peering into the baskets. "By all that's fortunate, here are the fireworks! Has anybody got a match? We'll take these with us, and go off in a blaze of triumph!"

The suggestion was no sooner made than adopted. We filled our hats and pockets with crackers and Catherine-wheels, piled all that we could not carry away into one great heap, threw a dozen or so of lighted fuses into the midst of them, and just as the voices of our pursuers were growing momentarily louder and nearer, darted away again down a fresh turning, and saw the river gleaming at the end of it.

"Hurrah! here's a boat!" shouted Sotherby, leaping into it, and we after him.

It was not our boat, but that did not signify. Ours was at the other side of the island, far enough away, down by the landing-place. Just as Oliphant seized the oars, there came a tremendous explosion, a column of rockets shot up into the air, and the place was instantly as light as day. A yell of discovery broke forth immediately, and we were seen almost as soon as we were fairly out of reach. We had secured the only boat on that side of the island, and three or four of Oliphant's powerful strokes had already carried us well into the middle of the stream. To let off our own store of fireworks—to pitch tokens of our regard to our friends on the island in the shape of blazing crackers, which fell sputtering and fizzing into the water half way between the boat and the shore—to stand up in the stern and bow politely, and finally to row away singing "God Save the Queen" with all our might, were feats upon which we prided ourselves very considerably at the time, and the recollection of which afforded us infinite amusement all the way home. That evening we all supped together at the Cheval Blanc, and of what we did or said after supper I have but a very confused remembrance. I believe that I tried to smoke a cigar, and it is my impression that I made a speech, in which I swore eternal friendship to both of my new friends; but the only circumstance about which I can make no mistake is, that I awoke next morning with the worst specimen of headache that had ever yet come within the limits of my experience.

## CHAPTER X.

### DAMON AND PYTHIAS.

I parted from Captain Oliphant at the Rouen terminus two days after the foregoing events, promising to call upon him at his lodgings in the Chaussee d'Antin within a fortnight or three weeks, and eager to find my way to that world of Paris from which he had already taught me to expect such wonders.

I left Rouen late in the evening, after dining with my two new friends, and so arrived in Paris between four and five o'clock on a bright midsummer Sunday morning. I was not long delayed by the customs' officers, for my baggage was trifling. Having left this at the first hotel I passed, I wandered about hither and thither, thinking to amuse myself till it should be late enough to call upon Dr. Lucet. It had been my intention to take immediate steps for my establishment in lodgings; but I forgot all about lodgings, and Dr. Lucet also, in admiration of the sights around me.

The morning air was clear and cool. The sun shone out vividly upon the high, white houses and glittering gilt balconies. Theatres, shops, cafés, and hotels not yet opened, lined the great thoroughfares. Triumphal arches, columns, parks, palaces, and churches revealed themselves in endless succession. Was there, in all the world, a nook called Normandene?

I passed a column crowned by a conqueror's statue—a palace tragic in history—a temple like a modern Parthenon. This latter was surrounded by columns peopled with sculptured friezes, and approached by a flight of steps the entire width of the building. The doors had just been opened, and a white-haired Sacristan was preparing the



seats for the matin service. There were acolytes decorating the altar with fresh flowers, and early devotees burning tapers at the shrine. The gilded ornaments, the tapers winking in the morning light, the statues, the paintings, the faint clinging odours of incense, the hushed atmosphere, the devotional silence, the white angels kneeling round the altar, all combined to increase my dream of delight. I gazed, wandered round and round, and at last, worn out with excitement and fatigue, shrank into a chair in a distant corner of the Church, and fell into a heavy sleep. How long it lasted I know not; but the voices of the choristers and the deep tones of the organ mingled with my dreams. When I awoke, the last worshippers were departing, the music had died into silence, the wax-lights were being extinguished, and the service was ended.

Again I went forth, and all was changed. Where there had been the silence of early morning there was now the confusion of a great city. Where there had been closed shutters and deserted thoroughfares, there was the bustle of life, the rushing to and fro of carriages, gaiety, business, and pleasure. The shops blazed with jewels and merchandise; the stone-masons were at work on the new buildings; the lemonade venders, with their gay stands upon their backs, were plying a noisy trade; the ladies and children were feasting their sight upon the milliners' windows; the bill-stickers were papering boardings and lamp posts with variegated advertisements; the charlatan, in his gaudy chariot, was selling pencils and penknives to the accompaniment of a hand organ; the soldiers were marching to the music of military bands; the merchant was in his counting-house, the stock-broker at the Bourse, and the lounge, whose name is Legion, was sitting in the open air outside his favorite café, drinking chocolate, and yawning over the *Charivari*.

I thought I must be dreaming. I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses. Could this be Sunday? Was it possible that our little church at home, where we could

hear the birds twittering outside in the sunshine, during every interval of the quiet service, was even now filled with worshippers, while here all was commerce and dissipation?

I can now scarcely recall how that day was spent, or with what varying emotions of admiration and mistrust I explored the fairy-land around me. I am sensible only of having wandered through the gardens of the Tuileries; of having found the Louvre open, and of losing myself among some of the upper galleries; of lying exhausted upon a bench in the Champs Elysées; of returning by quays lined with palaces and spanned by noble bridges; of pacing round and round the enchanted arcades of the Palais Royal, and of wondering how and when I should find my hotel, and, of deciding at last, that I could go no farther without dining somehow. Wearied and half stupified, I ventured, at length, into one of the large *restaurants* upon the Boulevards. The spacious rooms were lighted by superb chandeliers, these again were reflected in panellings of looking-glass that extended from floor to ceiling. Rows of small tables ran round the rooms, and a double line of tables down the centre, each laid with its snowy cloth and glittering silver.

It was early when I arrived, so I passed to the top of the room, and appropriated a small table commanding a view of the great throughfare below. The waiters were slow to serve me; the place filled speedily; and before I had progressed far with my dinner, the number of the feeding public had multiplied by twenty. Here sat a party of officers, bronzed and mustachioed; here a group of laughing girls—a couple of provincials—a family party, children, governess and all—a stout capitalist, solitary and self-content—a quatuor of rollicking *commis-voyageurs*—or an English couple, perplexed and curious. Amused by the sight of so many faces, listening to the hum of voices, and watching the flying waiters bearing all kinds of mysterious dishes, I loitered over my lonely meal, and

wished that this delightful whirl of novelty might last for ever. By and by a gentleman entered, walked up the whole length of the room in search of a seat by the window, found my table occupied by only a single person, bowed politely, and drew his chair opposite mine.

He was a tall and stately man of about forty-five or seven years of age, with a broad, calm brow, curling light hair, somewhat worn upon the temples, and large blue eyes, more keen than tender. His clothing was scrupulously simple, and his hands were immaculately white. He carried an umbrella little thicker than a walking-stick, and wrote out his list of dishes with a massive gold pencil. Added to this, the waiters bowed down before him, as if he were an habitué of the place.

It was not long before we fell into conversation. How it began, I scarcely know ; but we talked of Paris—or, rather, I talked, and he listened ; for, what with the excitement of the day, and what with the bottle of champagne *moussée* which (in my sense of unlimited riches) I had magnificently ordered, I found myself gifted with a sudden flood of words, and ran on, I fear, not very sensibly.

A few polite rejoinders, a smile, a bow, an assent, a question implied rather than spoken, sufficed to draw from me the particulars of my journey. I told everything, from my birth-place and education to my future plans and prospects ; and the stranger, with a frosty humour twinkling about his eyes, heard me throughout with undivided attention. He was himself particularly silent ; but he had the art of provoking conversation while quietly enjoying his own dinner. When this was finished, however, he leaned back in his chair, sipped his claret, and talked a little more freely.

And so," said he, in very excellent English, " you have come to Paris to finish your studies ; but have you no fear, young gentleman, that the attractions of so gay a city may divert your mind from graver subjects ? Do you

think that, when every pleasure may be had for the seeking, you can be content to devote yourself to the dry details of an uninteresting profession?"

"It is not an uninteresting profession," I replied. "There are some which I should have preferred; but at all events, having embarked in it, I am resolved to succeed."

The stranger smiled.

"I am glad," he said, "to see you so enthusiastic. Of course with those sentiments, you cannot fail of success. You will become a shining light in the brotherhood of Esculapius."

I hope so," I replied boldly. "I have studied closer than most of men of my age, already."

He smiled again, coughed doubtfully, and insisted on filling my glass from his own bottle.

"I only fear," he said, "that you will be too diffident of your own merits. Now, when you call upon this Doctor —, what did you say was his name?"

"Lucet," I replied, huskily.

"True, Lucet; well, when you meet him for the first time you will, perhaps, be timid, hesitating, and silent. But, believe me, a young man of your remarkable abilities should be self-possessed. You ought to inspire him from the beginning with a suitable respect for your talents."

"Oh, no fear of that," said I, boastfully, "I'll—I'll astonish him. I'm afraid of nobody—not I!"

The stranger filled my glass again. His claret must have been very strong, or my head very weak, for it seemed to me, as he did so, that all the chandeliers were in motion.

"Upon my word," observed he, "you are a young man of infinite spirit."

"And you," I replied, making an effort to bring the glass steadily to my lips, "you are a capital fellow—a clear-sighted, sensible, capital fellow. We must be friends."

He bowed, and said, somewhat coldly :

"I have no doubt that we shall become better acquainted."

"Better acquainted, indeed! We'll be intimate!" I ejaculated affectionately. "I'll introduce you to Oliphant—you'll like him excessively. Just the fellow to delight you."

"So I should say," observed the stranger, drily.

"And as for you and myself, we'll—we'll be Damon and——what's the other one's name?"

"Pythias," replied my new acquaintance, leaning back in his chair, and surveying me with a peculiar and very deliberate stare. "Exactly so—Damon and Pythias!—a charming arrangement!"

"Bravo! famous—and we'll have another bottle of wine."

"Not on my account, I beg," said the gentleman firmly.

"My head is not so cool as yours."

Cool, indeed, and the room whirling round and round, like a teetotum!

"Oh, if you won't, I won't," said I confusedly; "but I—I could—drink two bottles more, I assure you, and not feel the slightest——"

"I have no doubt on that point," said my neighbour, gravely, "but our French wines are deceptive, Mr. Leigh, and you might possibly feel yourself somewhat indisposed to-morrow. You, as a medical man, ought to know the sorrows of dyspepsia."

"Dy—dy—dyspepsia be hanged," I muttered dreamily. "Tell me, friend—by the by, I forget your name. Friend what?"

"Friend Pythias," returned the stranger, drily, "you gave me the name yourself."

"Aye, but your real name?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"One name is as good as another," said he, lightly.

"Let it be Pythias, for the present. But you were about to ask me something relative to——"

"To old Lucet," I said, leaning both elbows on the table, and speaking very confidentially. "Now tell me, have you—have you any notion of what he is like? Do you—know—know anything about him?"

"I have heard of him," he replied, intent, for the moment, on the pattern of his wine-glass.

"Clever?"

"I really am not a competent judge; but I believe there are persons who consider him highly."

"Come, now," said I, shaking my head, and trying to look knowing, "you—you know what I mean, well enough. Is he a grim old fellow? A—a—griffin, you know! Come, is he a gr—r—r—riffin?"

My words had by this time acquired a distressing, self-propelling tendency, and linked themselves into compound words of twenty and thirty syllables.

The gentleman smiled, bit his lip, and gave utterance to a dry, short laugh.

"Really," he said, "I am not in a position to reply to your question; but upon the whole, I should say that Dr. Lucet was not quite a griffin. The species, you see, is extinct."

I roared with laughter, applauded foolishly, vowed I had never heard a better joke in my life, and repeated his last words over and over, like a degraded idiot as I was. All at once, a sense of deadly faintness came upon me. I turned hot and cold by turns, and lifting my hand to my head, said, or tried to say:—

"Room's—'bominably—close!"

"We had better go out," he replied promptly. "The air will do you good. Leave me to settle for our dinners, and you shall make it right with me by and by."

He did so, and we left the room. Once out in the open air, I found myself unable to stand. He called a *fiacre*, almost lifted me in, took his place beside me, and asked the name of my hotel.

I had forgotten it ; but I knew that it was near the railway station, and that was enough. When we arrived, I was on the verge of insensibility. I remember that I was led up-stairs by two waiters, that the stranger saw me to my room, and assisted me to bed—then all was darkness, stupor, and the feverish helplessness of intoxication.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE NEXT MORNING.

"Oh, my Christian ducats!"—*Merchant of Venice*.

GONE!—gone!—both gone!—my new gold watch, and my purse with its hundred guineas worth of notes and Napoleons!

I rang the bell furiously. It was answered by a demure-looking waiter, with a face like a parroquet.

"Does Monsieur please to require anything?"

"Require anything!" I exclaimed, in the best French I could muster at a short notice. "I have been robbed!"

"Robbed, Monsieur?"

"Yes, of my watch and purse!"

"Really? Of a watch and purse?" repeated the parroquet, lifting his eyebrows with an air of well-bred surprise. "*C'est drôle.*"

"Droll!" I cried, furiously. "Droll, you scoundrel! I'll let you know whether I think it droll! I'll complain to the authorities! I'll have the house searched! I'll—I'll——"

I rang the bell again and again. Two or three more waiters came, and the master of the hotel. They all treated my communication in the same manner—coolly, incredulously, but with unruffled politeness.

"Monsieur forgets," urged the master, "that he came to his apartment last night in a state of absolute intoxication. Monsieur was accompanied by a stranger, who was gentlemanly, it is true; but since Monsieur acknowledges that that gentlemanly stranger was personally unknown to him, Monsieur may well perceive that his suspicions would be more reasonably directed towards that quarter."

Struck by the force of this observation, I flung myself into a chair and remained silent.



"Has Monsieur no acquaintances in Paris from whom to ask advice?" enquired the landlord.

"None," said I, moodily, "except that I have a letter of introduction to one Dr. Lucet."

The landlord and his waiters exchanged glances.

"I would respectfully recommend Monsieur to present his letter immediately," said the former. "Monsieur le Docteur Lucet is a man of the world—a man of high reputation and sagacity. Monsieur could not do better than advise with him."

"Call a cab for me," said I, after a long pause. "I will go."

The determination cost me something. Overwhelmed with dismay for my loss, racked with a fearful headache, languid, pale, and deeply sensible of last night's folly, it needed but this humiliation to complete my misery. What! appear before my instructor for the first time with such a tale! I could have bitten my lips through with vexation.

The cab was called. I saw, but would not see, the winks and nods exchanged behind my back by the grinning waiters. I flung myself into the vehicle, and found myself once more rattling through the noisy streets. But I admired nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing, on the way. I could think only of my father's anger and the contempt of Dr. Lucet.

Presently the coach stopped before a large wooden gate with two enormous knockers. This was half opened by a servant in a sad-coloured livery. I was shown across a broad courtyard, up the lofty steps of a large white house, and into a spacious parlour plainly furnished.

"Monsieur le Docteur is at present engaged," said the servant, with an air of profound respect. "Monsieur will have the goodness to be seated for a few moments."

I sat down—I rose up—I examined the books upon the table, and the pictures on the walls. I wished myself "anywhere, anywhere, out of the world," and more

than once was on the point of stealing out of the house, jumping into my cab, and making off without seeing the doctor at all. One consideration alone prevented me. I had lost all my money, and had not even a franc left to pay the driver. Presently a footstep put an end to all my doubts, and I heard the dreaded announcement:—"Monsieur le Docteur will be happy to receive Monsieur in his study."

I rose and followed, mechanically. We passed through a passage thickly carpeted, and paused before a green baize door. This glided noiselessly open, and I felt myself in the great man's presence. I bowed nervously, but I saw him not. My eyes were fixed upon the carpet.

"It gives me pleasure to welcome the son of my old friend, Thomas Leigh," said a clear, and not unfamiliar voice.

I started, looked up, grew red and white, hot and cold, and had not a syllable to utter in reply.

In Doctor Lucet, I recognised——

—PYTHIAS!

## CHAPTER XII.

### MYSTERIOUS PROCEEDINGS.

The doctor pointed to a chair, looked at his watch, and said:—

“I hope you have had a pleasant journey. Arrived this morning?”

There was not the faintest gleam of recognition on his face. Not a smile, not a glance—nothing but the easy politeness of a stranger to a stranger.

“N—not exactly,” I faltered. “Yesterday morning, sir.”

“Ah, indeed! Spent the day sight-seeing, I dare say. Admire Paris?”

Too much astonished to speak, I took refuge in a bow.

“Not found any lodgings yet, I presume?” asked the doctor, mending a pen very deliberately.

“N—not yet, sir.”

I concluded so. The English do not seek apartments on a Sunday. You observe the day very strictly, no doubt?”

Blushing and confused, I stammered some incoherent words, and sat twirling my hat, the very picture of remorse.

“What hotel do you patronise?” he next enquired, without appearing to observe my agitation.

“The—the Hotel des Messageries.”

“Good, but expensive. You must find a lodging to-day.”

I bowed again.

“And, as your father’s representative, I must take care that you procure something suitable and are not imposed upon. My valet shall go with you.”

He rang the bell, and the sad-coloured footman appeared on the threshold.

"Desire Bernard to be in readiness to walk out with this gentleman," said he briefly, and the servant retired.

"Bernard," he continued, addressing me again, "is faithful and sagacious. He will instruct you on certain points indispensable to a resident in Paris, and will see that you are not ill-accommodated or overcharged. A young man has few wants, and I should infer that a couple of rooms in some quiet street will be all that you require?"

"I—I am very grateful, I am sure," I began.

He waved down my thanks with an air of cold but polite authority; took out his note-book and pencil; (I could have sworn to that massive gold pencil!) and proceeded to question me.

"Your age, I think," said he, "is twenty-one?"

"Twenty, sir."

"Ah—twenty. You desire to be entered upon the list of visiting students at the Hotel Dieu, to be free of the library and lecture-rooms, and to be admitted into my public classes?"

"Yes sir."

"Also, to attend here in my house for private instruction, and to act generally as my medical assistant?"

"Yes sir."

He filled in a few words upon a printed form, and handed it to me with his visiting card.

"You will present these, and your passport, to the secretary at the hospital," said he, "and will receive, in return, the requisite tickets of admission. Your fees have already been paid in, and your name has been entered. You must see to this matter at once, as the *bureau* closes at two o'clock. You will then require the rest of the day for lodging-seeking, moving, and so forth. Tomorrow morning, at nine o'clock, I shall expect you in my surgery."

"Indeed, sir," I murmured, "I am more obliged than——"

"Not in the least," he interrupted decisively; "your father's son has every claim upon my interest. I object to thanks; all that I require from you are habits of industry, punctuality, and respect. Your father speaks well of you, and I have no doubt that I shall find you all that he represents. Is there anything more that I can do for you this morning?"

I hesitated, could not bring myself to utter one word of that which I had come to say, and murmured—"Nothing more, I thank you, sir."

He looked at me piercingly, paused an instant, and then rang the bell.

"I am about to order my carriage," he said; "and, as I am going in that direction, I will take you as far as the Hotel Dieu."

"But—but I have a cab at the door," I faltered, remembering with a sinking heart, that I had not a sou to pay the driver.

The servant appeared again.

"Let the carriage be brought round immediately, and dismiss this gentleman's cab."

The man retired, and I heaved a sigh of relief. The doctor bent low over the papers on his desk, and I fancied for the moment that a faint smile flitted over his face. Then he took up his hat, and pointed to the door. "Now, my young friend," said he authoritatively, "we must be gone. Time is gold. After you."

I bowed and preceded him. His very courtesy was sterner than the displeasure of another, and I already felt towards him a greater degree of awe than I should have quite cared to confess. The carriage was waiting in the courtyard. I placed myself with my back to the horses; Dr. Lucet flung himself carelessly upon the opposite seat; a servant out of livery sprang up beside the coachman; the great gates were flung open; and we glided away on the easiest of springs and the softest of cushions.

Dr. Lucet took a newspaper from his pocket, and began

reading. I was left to my own uncomfortable reflections.

"Oh, Stanton Leigh! Stanton Leigh!" thought I. "What a wondrous idiot thou hast been! What a delicious position thou art in: watchless and moneyless, with a bill awaiting thee at thine hotel, and not a silver in thy pocket to pay it withal! Miserable pupil of a stern master—luckless son of a savage father, what is now to become of thee? Here is thy taskmaster, and thou tremblest in thy shoes before his eyes; and yet—oh most delectable bumpkin of Normandene!—this is the very individual whom thou wouldst have accused of a theft! Petty larceny and Doctor Lucet! how ludicrously impossible! Where, then, is thy property? Is the Hotel des Messageries a den of thieves? And, again, how is it that this same surgeon recogniseth thee not? Art thou mad, or dreaming, or both? Or is it that, being unknown to thee last evening, he is to day magnanimous enough to ignore all recollection of thee and thy folly?"

The opening of the carriage door broke the thread of my reverie.

"Hotel Dieu, M'sieur," said the servant, touching his hat.

Dr. Lucet just raised his eyes from the paper.

"This is your first destination," he said. "I would advise you, on leaving here, to return to your hotel. There may be letters awaiting you. Good morning."

With this he resumed his paper, the carriage rolled away, and I found myself at the Hotel Dieu, with the servant out of livery standing respectfully behind me.

Go back to my hotel! Why should I go back? Letters there could be none, unless at the Poste Restante. I thought this a very unnecessary piece of advice, determined not to follow it, and so went into the hospital *bureau*, and transacted my business. When I came out again, Bernard took the lead.

He was an elderly man with a solemn countenance and a mysterious voice. His manner was oppressively respectful,

his phraseology diplomatic, and his step as stealthy as a courtier's. When we came to a crossing, he bowed, stood aside, and followed me; then took the lead again, and so on, during a brisk walk of about half an hour. All at once I found myself at the entrance to the Hotel des Messageries.

"Monsieur's hotel," said the doctor's valet, touching his hat.

"You are mistaken," said I, rather impatiently. "I did not ask to be brought here."

"Post in at mid-day, Monsieur," he observed, gravely. "Monsieur's letters may have arrived."

"I expect none, thank you."

"Monsieur will, nevertheless, permit me to enquire," said the persevering valet, and glided in before my eyes.

The thing was absurd! Both master and servant insisted that I must have letters, whether I would, or no! To my still greater amazement, however, Bernard came out again with a small sealed box in his hands.

"No letters have arrived for Monsieur," he said; "but this box was left with the porter about an hour ago."

I weighed it in my hands, shook it, examined the seals, and, going into the public room, desired Bernard to follow me. Then I opened it. It contained a folded paper, a quantity of wadding, my purse, my roll of bank-notes, and my gold watch!

On the paper I read the following words:—

"Learn from the events of last night the value of temperance, the wisdom of silence, and the danger of chance acquaintanceships. Accept the lesson, and he by whom it is administered will forget the error."

The paper dropped from my hands and fell upon the floor. The impenetrable Bernard picked it up, and returned it to me.

"Bernard!" I ejaculated, looking him earnestly in the face.

"Monsieur?" said he, interrogatively, raising his hand

to his forehead by force of habit, although his hat stood beside him on the floor. There was not a shadow of meaning in his face—not a quiver to denote that he knew anything of what had passed. To judge from the stolid indifference of his manner, one might have supposed that the delivery of caskets full of watches and valuables was an event of daily occurrence in the house of Dr. Lucet. His coolness silenced my curiosity. I drew a long breath, hastened to lock up my money in my own room, put on my watch, and so went down to the master of the hotel, and informed him of the recovery of my property. He smiled and congratulated me; but did not seem to be in the least surprised. I fancied, somehow, that matters were not quite so mysterious to him as they had been to me.

I also fancied that I heard a suspicious roar of laughter as I passed out into the street.

It was not long before I found the apartments I required. Piloted by Bernard through some broad thoroughfares, and along a part of the Boulevards, I came upon a cluster of narrow streets, branching off through a massive stone gateway from the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre. This little nook was called the Cité Bergerè. The houses were white and lofty. Some had courtyards, and all were decorated with pretty iron balconies, and delicately tinted Venetian shutters. Most of them bore the significant announcement—“*Apartements a louer*”—suspended like a sign above the door. Outside one of these houses sat two men with a little table between them. They were playing at dominoes, and wore the common blue blouse of the mechanic class. A woman stood by paring some celery, with an infant playing on the mat inside the door, and a cat purring at her feet. It was a pleasant group. The men looked honest, the woman good-tempered, and the house exquisitely clean; so the diplomatic Bernard went forward to negotiate, while I walked up and down outside. There were chambers to let on the second, third, and fifth



storeys, of various prices and dimensions. The fifth was too high, and those on the third suited my means better than those on the second. The *suite* consisted of a bedroom, dressing-room, and tiny *salon*, and were furnished with that elegant uncomfortableness characteristic of our French neighbours. Floors shiney and carpetless; windows that objected to open, and drawers that refused to shut; an ormolu time-piece that struck all kinds of miscellaneous hours at unexpected times; an abundance of vases filled with faded artificial flowers, but a woful scarcity of ablutionary items; insecure chairs of white and gold; and a round table that turned over suddenly, like a table in a pantomime, if you ventured to place anything on any part but the inlaid star in the centre, constituted the chief part of the furniture. There were mirrors all round the walls, and lots of plaster statuettes, and china images; and, above all, there was a balcony big enough for a couple of chairs and some flower-pots, overlooking the street.

I was delighted with everything. In imagination I beheld my balcony already blooming with roses, and my shelves laden with books. I admired the white and gold chairs with all my heart, and saw myself reflected in half a dozen mirrors at once with an innocent pride of ownership which can only be appreciated by those who have tasted the supreme luxury of going into chambers for the first time.

"Shall I conclude for Monsieur at twenty francs a week?" murmured the sagacious Bernard.

"Of course," said I, laying the first week's rent upon the table.

And so the thing was done, and, full of satisfaction, I went off to the hotel for my luggage, and moved in immediately.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BROADCLOTH AND CIVILIZATION.

ALLOWING for my inexperience in the use of the language, I prospered better than I had expected, and found, to my satisfaction, that I was by no means behind my French fellow-students in medical knowledge. I passed through my preliminary examination with credit, and, although Dr. Lucet was careful not to praise me too soon, I had reason to believe that he was satisfied with my progress. As for my conduct, it was steadiness and regularity itself. My country breeding had made me timid, and the difficulties of the language only increased my natural reserve; so that although I lived and studied day after day in the society of some two or three hundred young men, I yet lived as solitary a life as Robinson Crusoe in his island. No one sought to know me. No one took a liking for me. Gay, noisy, chattering fellows that they were, they passed me by for a "dull and muddy-pated rogue," voted me uncompanionable when I was only shy, and, doubtless, quoted me to each other as a rare specimen of the silent Englishman. I lived, too, quite out of the students' colony. To me the *Quartier Latin* was a land unknown, except by name; and the student's life—that wonderful *Vie de Bohême* which furnishes forth half the fiction of the Paris press—a condition of being, about which I had never even heard. What wonder, then, that I never arrived at Dr. Lucet's door five minutes behind time, nor missed a lecture, nor forgot an appointment? What wonder that, after dropping moodily into one or two of the theatres, I settled down quite quietly in my lodgings, gave up my days to study, sauntered about the lighted alleys of the Champs Elysées in the summer evenings, and, going home betimes, spent an hour or two with my books, and kept

almost as early hours as in my father's house at Normandene?

After I had been living thus for rather longer than three weeks, I made up my mind, one Sunday morning, to call at Oliphant's rooms, and enquire if he had yet arrived in Paris. It was about eleven o'clock when I reached the Chausée d'Antin, and learned that he was not only arrived, but at home. Being by this time in possession of the luxury of a card, I sent one up, and was immediately admitted. I found breakfast still upon the table, Oliphant with a desk and cash-box open before him, and, standing somewhat back, with his elbow resting on the chimney-piece, a gentleman smoking a cigar. They both looked up as I was announced, and Oliphant, after welcoming me with a hearty grasp, introduced this gentleman as Monsieur de Longueville.

M. de Longueville bowed, knocked the ash from his cigar, and looked as if he thought me an intolerable intrusion. Oliphant was really glad to see me.

"I have been expecting you, Leigh," said he, "for the last week. If you had not soon beaten up my quarters, I should have tried, somehow, to find out yours. What have you been about all this time? Where are you located? What mischief have you been perpetrating since our expedition to the *guingette* on the river? Come, you have a thousand things to tell me?"

M. de Longueville looked at his watch—a magnificent affair decorated with a costly chain, and a profusion of pendant trifles—and threw the last half of his cigar into the fireplace.

"You must excuse me, *mon ami*," said he. "I have at least a dozen calls to make before dinner."

Oliphant rose, readily enough, and took a roll of bank-notes from the cash-box.

"If you are going," said he, "I may as well give you the money for that Tilbury. When will they send it home to me, do you say?"

"To-morrow, undoubtedly."

"And the price is fifteen hundred francs?"

"Just half its value!" observed M. de Longueville, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Oliphant smiled, counted the notes, and handed them to his friend.

"Fifteen hundred may be half its cost," said he; "but I doubt if I am paying much less than its full value. Just see that these are right."

M. de Longueville ruffled the papers daintily over, and consigned them to his pocket-book. As he did so, I could not help observing the whiteness of his hands and the sparkle of a huge brilliant on his little finger. He was a pale, slender, olive-hued man, with very dark eyes, and glittering teeth, and a black moustache inclining superciliously upwards at each corner; somewhat too *nonchalant*, perhaps, in his manner, and somewhat too profuse in the article of jewellery; but a very elegant gentleman, nevertheless.

"*Bon!*" said he, "I am glad you have bought it. I would have taken it myself, had the thing happened a week or two earlier. Poor Lefort! To think that he should have come to this, after all!"

"I am sorry for him," said Oliphant, "but it is a case of wilful ruin. He made up his mind to go to the devil, and went accordingly. I am only surprised that the crash came no sooner."

M. de Longueville twitched at the supercilious moustache.

"And you think you would not care to take the black mare with the Tilbury?" said he, negligently.

"No—I have a capital horse, already."

"Hah! —well—'tis almost a pity. The mare is a dead bargain. Shouldn't wonder if I buy her, after all."

"And yet you don't want her," said Oliphant.

"Quite true; but one must have a favourite sin, and horse-flesh is mine. I shall ruin myself by it some day—

*mort de ma vie!* By the way, have you seen my chesnut in harness? No? Then you will be really pleased. Goes delightfully with the grey, and manages tandem to perfection. *Parbleu!* I was forgetting—do we meet to-night?"

"Where?"

"At Mèrinval's."

Oliphant shook his head, and turned the key in his cash-box.

"Not this evening," replied he. "I have other engagements."

"That is unfortunate, for I promised to go, believing you were sure to be of the party. St. Amand, I know, will be there, and de Brissac also."

"Mèrinval's parties are charming things in their way," said Oliphant, somewhat coldly, and no man more heartily enjoys Burgundy and Lansquenet than myself; but one might grow to care for nothing else, and I have no desire to fall into worse habits than those I have contracted already."

M. de Longueville laughed a dry, short laugh, and twitched again at the supercilious moustache.

"I had no idea," said he, "that you were a philosopher."

"Nor am I. I am a *mauvais sujet*, and nothing better."

"Well, adieu, I will see to this affair of the Tilbury, and desire them to let you have it by noon to-morrow."

"A thousand thanks. I am ashamed that you have so much trouble in the matter. *Au revoir.*"

"*Au revoir.*"

And, with this, M. de Longueville honoured me with a passing bow, and took his departure. Being near the window, I saw him spring into an elegant cabriolet, and drive off with the showiest of high horses, and the tiniest of tigers.

He was no sooner gone than Oliphant took me by the shoulders, placed me in an easy chair, poured out a couple of glasses of hock, and said—

"Now, then, my young friend, your news or your life ! Out with it, every word, as you hope to be forgiven !"

I had but little to tell, and for that little, found myself, as I had anticipated, heartily laughed at. My adventure at the Restaurants, my meeting unlucky with Dr. Lucet, and the whole history of our next interview, delighted Oliphant beyond measure.

Nothing would satisfy him, after this, but to call me Damon, to enquire repeatedly after Doctor Pythias, and to remind me continually of the desirableness of Arcadian friendships.

"And so, Damon," said he, "you go nowhere, see nothing, and know nobody. This sort of life will never do ! I must take you out—introduce you—show you into society, somehow or another, before I leave Paris."

"I should be heartily glad to know one or two private families," I replied, "and very much obliged to you if you can afford me the opportunity. To spend the winter in this place without knowing a soul, would be something frightful."

Oliphant looked at me half laughingly, half compassionately.

"Before I do it, then," said he, "you must look a little less like a savage, and more like a tame Christian. You must have your hair cut, and learn to tie your cravat properly, and study the art of bowing. Do you possess an evening suit ?"

Blushing to the tips of my ears, I not only confessed that I was destitute of that desirable outfit ; but also that I had never yet in all my life had occasion to require it.

"I am glad of it ; for now you are sure to be well fitted. Your tailor, depend on it, is your great civiliser, and a well made suit of clothes is in itself a liberal education. I'll take you to Michand—my own especial provider. He is a great artist : with so many yards of superfine black cloth, he will give you the tone of good society, and the exterior of a gentleman. In short, he will do for you in eight or ten hours more than I could do in as many years."

"Pray introduce me at once to this illustrious man," I exclaimed laughingly, "and let me do him homage!"

"You will have to pay heavily for the honour," said Oliphant. "Of that I give you notice."

"No matter. I am willing to pay heavily for the tone of good society and the exterior of a gentleman."

"Very good. Take a book, then, or a cigar, and amuse yourself for five minutes while I write a note. That done you may command me for as long as you please."

I took the first book that came, and finding it to be a history of the horse, amused myself, instead, by observing the aspect of Oliphant's apartment.

Rooms are often the most significant of biographies. They scarcely ever fail to reflect the characters, as they represent the tastes, of their inhabitants. They betray at first sight if the owner be careless or orderly, studious or idle, vulgar or refined. A flower on the table, an engraving on the walls, a vase on the mantelpiece, stands as an index of refinement; and a well filled book-case says more in favour of its possessor than the most elaborate letter of recommendation. Oliphant's rooms were, for instance, singularly indicative. Careless, luxurious, and disorderly, and crammed with all kinds of costly things, and characterised by a sort of reckless elegance, they expressed, as I interpreted it, the very history of the man. Rich hangings, luxurious carpets, walls covered with paintings, cabinets of bronzes and rare porcelain; a statuette of Rachel beside a bust of Homer; a book-case full of French novels with a sprinkling of Shakespeare and Horace; a stand of foreign arms; a lamp from Pompeii; a silver casket full of cigars; tables piled up with newspapers, letters, pipes, riding whips, faded bouquets, and all kinds of miscellaneous rubbish; and an atmosphere redolent of tobacco—such were my friend's surroundings, and such, had I speculated upon them beforehand, I should just have expected them to be. Oliphant, in the meanwhile, dispatched his letter with characteristic rapidity. His pen rushed over

the paper like a dragoon charge, nor was once laid aside till both letter and address were finished. Just as he was impressing his signet on the wax, a note was brought to him by his servant—a slender, narrow, perfumed note, written on creamy paper, and sealed with a delicate pink seal. Had I lived in the world of society for the last hundred seasons I could not have interpreted the appearance of that note more sagaciously."

"It is from a lady," said I to myself. Then seeing Oliphant tear up his own letter immediately after reading it, and begin another, I added, still in my own mind—"And it is from the lady to whom he was writing."

Presently he paused, laid his pen aside, and said—

"Leigh, would you like to go with me to-morrow evening to one or two *soirées*?"

"Can your Civiliser provide me with my evening suit in time?"

"He? The great Michand? Why, he would equip you for this evening, if it were necessary!"

"In that case I shall be very glad to accompany you."

"*Bon!* I will call for you at ten o'clock, so do not forget to leave me your address."

Whereupon he resumed his letter, and when it was written, he returned to the subject.

"Then I will take you to-morrow night," said he, "to a reception at Madame Rachel's; hers is the most beautiful house in Paris. I know fifty men who would give their ears to be admitted to her *salons*."

Even in the wilds of Normandene, I had heard and read of the great *tragedienne* whose wealth vied with the Rothschilds, and whose diamonds might have graced a crown. I had looked forward to the probability of beholding her from afar off, if ever again she made her appearance on the boards of the Theatre Francais; but to be admitted to her presence, received in her house, introduced to her in person—I could hardly believe in the possibility so great a privilege!



Oliphant smiled good-naturedly, and put my thanks aside.

"It is a great sight," said he, "and nothing more. She will bow to you—she may not even speak; and she would pass you the next morning without remembering that she had ever seen you in her life. Actresses are a race apart, my dear fellow, and care for no one who is neither rich nor famous."

"I never imagined," said I, half annoyed, "that she would take any notice of me at all. Even a bow from such a woman is an event to be remembered."

"Having received that bow, then," continued Oliphant, "and having enjoyed the ineffable satisfaction of returning it, you can go on with me to the house of a lady close by, who receives every Monday evening. At her *soirées* you will meet pleasant and refined people, and having been once introduced by me, you will, I have no doubt, find the house open to you for the future."

"That would, indeed, be a privilege. Who is this lady?"

"Her name," said Oliphant, with an involuntary glance at the little note upon his desk, "is Madame d'Argenteuil. She is a very charming and accomplished lady."

I decided in my own mind that Madame d'Argenteuil was the writer of that note.

"Is she married?" was my next question.

"She is a widow," replied Oliphant. "Monsieur d'Argenteuil was advanced in life, and held office as a cabinet minister during the greater part of the reign of Louis Philippe. He has been dead these four or five years."

"Then she is rich?"

"No—not rich; but sufficiently independent."

"And handsome?"

"Not handsome, either; but graceful, and very fascinating."

Graceful, fascinating, independent, and a widow! Coupling these facts with the correspondence which I believed

I had detected, I grouped them into quite a little romance, and laid out my friend's future career as confidently as if it had depended only on myself to marry him out of hand, and make all parties happy.

Oliphant sat musing for a moment, with his chin resting on his hands, and his eyes fixed on the desk. Then shaking back his hair as if he would shake back his thoughts with it, he started suddenly to his feet, and said, laughingly—

“Now, young Damon, farewell to ‘Tempe and the vales of Arcady,’ and hey for civilization, and a swallow-tailed coat!”

I noticed, however, that before we left the room, he put the little note tenderly away in a drawer of his desk, and locked it with a tiny gold key that hung upon his watch-chain.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### I MAKE MY DEBUT IN SOCIETY.

At ten o'clock Oliphant called for me, and by ten o'clock, thanks to the great Michand, and other men of genius, I presented a faultless exterior. My friend walked round me with a candle, and then sat down and examined me critically.

"By Jove," said hê, "I don't believe I should have known you! You are a living testimony to the art of tailoring. I shall call on Michand to-morrow, and pay my tribute of admiration!"

"I am very uncomfortable," said I, ruefully.

"Uncomfortable! nonsense; Michand's customers don't know the meaning of the word."

"But he has not made me a single pocket!"

"And what of that? Do you suppose that the great Michand would spoil the fit of a masterpiece for your convenience?"

"What am I to do with my handkerchief?"

"Michand's customers never need handkerchiefs."

"And then my trousers——"

"Unreasonable juvenile, what of the trousers?"

"They are so tight that I dare not sit down in them."

"Barbarian! Michand's customers never sit down in society."

"And my boots are so small that I can hardly endure them."

"Very becoming to the foot," said Oliphant, with exasperating indifference.

"And my collar is so stiff that it almost cuts my throat."

"Makes you hold your head up," said Oliphant, "and leaves you no inducement to commit suicide."

I could not help laughing, despite my discomfort.

"Job himself never had such a consoler!" I exclaimed. "It would be a downright pleasure to quarrel with you."

"Put on your hat instead, and let us delay no longer," replied my friend. "My cab is waiting."

So we went down, and in another moment were driving through the lighted streets. I should hardly have chosen to confess how my heart beat when, on turning an angle of the Rue Trudon, our cab fell into the rear of three or four other carriages, passed into a courtyard crowded with arriving and departing vehicles, and drew up before an open door, whence a broad stream of light flowed out to meet us. A couple of footmen waited just within the door, in a hall lighted by torches and decorated with stands of antique armour. From the centre of this hall sprang a Gothic staircase, so light, so richly sculptured, so full of niches and statues, slender columns, foliated capitals, and delicate ornamentation of every kind, that it looked a very "blossoming" of the stone. Following Oliphant up this superb staircase, and through a vestibule of carved oak, I next found myself in a room that might have been the scene of Plato's symposium. Here were walls painted in classic fresco, windows curtained with draperies of chocolate and amber cloth, chairs and couches carved in antique fashion, Etruscan amphoræ, vases and pateræ of terra-cotta, exquisite lamps, statuettes and candelabra in rare green bronze, and curious parti-coloured busts of philosophers and heroes, in all kinds of variegated marbles. Powdered footmen serving modern coffee seemed here like anachronisms in livery. In such a room one should have partaken only of classic dishes; of the plaiçe of Utica, the shrimps of Minturna or the *maati* of Athens.

Some half-dozen gentlemen, chatting over their coffee, bowed to Oliphant when we came in, and, with all the freemasonry of good breeding, at once admitted us to their conversation. Their topic was the war in Algiers, with especial reference to the gallantry of a certain Vicomte

de Marly, in whom they seemed to take a more than ordinary interest.

"Rode, single-handed, right through the enemy's camp," said a bronzed, elderly man, with a short, grey beard.

"And escaped without a scratch," added one with a tiny red ribbon at his button-hole.

"He comes of a gallant stock," said a third. "I remember his father at Austerlitz—literally cut to pieces at the head of his squadron."

"You are speaking of de Marly," said Oliphant. "What news of him from Algiers?"

"This, that having volunteered to carry some important despatches to head-quarters, he preferred riding by night through Abd-el-Kader's camp, to taking a *detour* by the mountains," replied the first speaker.

"A wild piece of boyish daring," said Oliphant, somewhat drily. "I presume he did not return by the same road?"

"I should think not. It would have been certain death a second time!"

"And this happened how long since?"

"About a fortnight. But we shall soon know all particulars from himself."

"From himself?" repeated Oliphant.

"Yes, he has obtained leave of absence; is, perhaps, by this time in Paris."

Oliphant laid down his cup untasted, and turned away.

"Come, Leigh," said he hastily, "I must introduce you to Madame Rachel."

We passed through a small antechamber, and into a brilliant *salon*, the very reverse of antique. Here all was light and colour. Here were hangings of flowered chintz; fantastic divans; loungechairs of every conceivable shape and hue; great Indian jars; richly framed drawings; stands of exotic plants; Chinese cages, filled with valuable birds from distant climes; folios of engravings; and, above all, a large cabinet in marqueterie, crowded with

bronzes, Chinese carvings, pastille-burners, fans, medals, Dresden groups, Sevres vases, Venetian glass, Asiatic idols, and all kinds of precious trifles in tortoise-shell, mother o'-pearl, malachite, onyx, lapis lazuli, jasper, ivory, and mosaic. In this room, sitting, standing, turning over engravings, or grouped here and there on sofas and divans, were some twenty-five or thirty gentlemen, all busily engaged in conversation. Saluting some of these by a passing bow, my friend led the way without pausing, straight through the *salon* and into one immediately beyond it.

"This," said he, "is one of the most beautiful rooms in Paris. Look round and tell me if you recognise, among all her votaries, the divinity herself."

I looked round, bewildered. "Recognise!" I echoed. "I should not recognise my own father at this moment. I feel like Abon Hassan in the palace of the Caliph."

"Or like Christopher Sly, when he wakes in the nobleman's bedchamber," said Oliphant; "though I should ask your pardon for the comparison. But, see, what it is to be an actress with forty-two thousand francs of salary per week. See these panels painted by Muller—this chandelier by Denière, of which no copy exists—this bust of Napoleon by Canova—these hangings of purple and gold—this ceiling all carved and gilded, than which the palace at Versailles contains nothing more elaborately beautiful! *Allons Donc!* have you nothing to say in admiration of so much splendour?"

I shook my head—

"What shall I say?—what can I say? Is this the house of an actress, or the palace of a prince? But stay—that pale woman yonder, all in white, with a plain gold circlet on her head—who is she?"

"Phédre herself," replied Oliphant; "follow me, and be introduced."

She was sitting in a large fauteuil of purple velvet. One foot rested on a stool richly carved and gilt; one arm rested negligently on a table covered with curious

foreign weapons. In her right hand she held a singular poignard, the blade of which was damascened with gold, and the handle made of bronze, exquisitely modelled into the form of a human skeleton. With this horrible toy she kept playing as she spoke, apparently unconscious of its grim significance. Some ten or a dozen distinguished-looking men, most of them profusely *décoré*, were sitting and standing round her ; but made way courteously upon our approach. Oliphant then presented me ; I made my bow, was graciously received, and dropped into the rear without having compromised myself by any evidence of *gaucherie* more serious than a blush.

" I began to think that Captain Oliphant had forsworn Paris," said Rachel, still toying with the skeleton dagger. " It is surely a year since I last had this pleasure ? "

" Nay, madame, you flatter me," said Oliphant, " I have been absent only four months. "

" Then, you see, I have measured your absence by my loss. "

Oliphant bowed profoundly.

Rachel turned to a young man behind her chair.

" Monsieur le Comte," said she, " do you know what is said in the *foyer* of the Français ? That you have offered me your hand ! "

" I offer you both my hands, in applause, madame, every night of your performance, " replied the gentleman so addressed.

She smiled and made a feint at him with the dagger.

" Excellent ! " said she. " One is not enough for a tragedian. But where is Alphonse Karr ? "

" I have been looking for him all the evening, " said a tall man, with an iron-grey beard. He told me that he was coming ; but authors are capricious beings—the slaves of the pen. "

" True ; he lives by his pen—others die by it, " said Rachel bitterly. By the way, has any one seen the new Vaudeville by Scribe ? "

"I have," replied a bald little gentleman with a red and green ribbon in his button-hole.

"And your verdict, Monsieur?"

"Admirable; but Scribe is only godfather to the piece. It is almost entirely written by Duverger, his *collaborateur*."

"The life of a *collaborateur*," said Rachel, "is a long act of self abnegation. Another takes all the honour—he all the labour. Thus soldiers fall, and their generals reap the glory."

"A *collaborateur*," said a cynical-looking man, who had not yet spoken, "is a hackney vehicle which one hires on the road to fame, and which one dismisses at the end of the journey."

"Sometimes without paying the fare," added a gentleman who had till now been examining, weapon by weapon, all the curious poignards and pistols on the table. "But what is this, madame? Truly a singular ornament for a drawing-room table!"

And he held up what appeared to be a large bone, perforated in several places.

The bald little man, with the red and green ribbon, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"It is a tibia!" said, he examining it through his double eye-glass.

"And what of that?" laughed Rachel. "Is it so wonderful to find one leg in a collection of arms? However, not to puzzle you, I may as well acknowledge that it was brought to me from Rome by a learned Italian, and is a really curious antique. The Romans made flutes of the leg-bones of their enemies, and this is one of them."

"A musical barbarity!" exclaimed one.

"Puts a 'stop,' at all events, to your enemy's means of flight!" said another.

"Almost as good as drinking out of his skull," added a third.

"Or eating him, *tout de bon*," said Rachel.

"There must be a certain satisfaction in cannibalism,"



observed the cynic who had spoken before. "There are people upon whom one would sup willingly."

"Critics, for instance, who are our natural enemies," said Rachel. "That is, if critics were not too sour to be eatable."

"Or vengeance a sauce not sufficiently sweet," added the cynic.

"You speak feelingly, Monsieur de Musset. I could almost be sorry, for your sake, that cannibalism is out of fashion!"

"It is one of the penalties of civilization," replied de Musset, with a shrug. "Besides, one would not wish to be an epicure."

Oliphant, who had been listening somewhat disdainfully to the skirmish of words, here touched me on the arm, and turned away.

"Have you seen and heard enough?" asked he. "Or has this 'feast of reason' taken away your appetite for simpler fare?"

"If you mean, am I ready to go with you to Madame d'Argenteuil's—yes."

"*A la bonne heure!*"

"But you are not going away without taking leave of Madame Rachel?"

"Most unquestionably. Leave-taking is a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance."

"But isn't that very impolite?"

"*Ingénu!* Do you not know that society ignores everything disagreeable? A leave-taker sets an unpleasant example, disturbs the harmony of things, and reminds others to look at their watches. Besides which, he suggests unwelcome possibilities. Perhaps he finds the party dull,—at all events he may be going to one that is pleasanter, and that is even worse."

By this time we were once again in our cab, and rattling along the Boulevard. The theatres were blazing with light. The road was full of carriages. The *trottoir*,

though less populous than at noon, was animated enough ; and the idlers outside the *cafés* were still eating their ices and sipping their *eau-sucré* as negligently as though, instead of being past eleven at night, it were scarcely eleven in the morning. In a few minutes, we had once more turned aside out of the great thoroughfare, and stopped at a private house in a quiet street. A carriage driving off, a cab drawing up behind our own, open windows with drawn blinds upon which were profiled passing shadows of the guests within, and the ringing tones of a soprano voice accompanied by a piano, gave sufficient indications of a party, and seemed to afford no little amusement to the crowd of soldiers, *gamins*, and *grisettes*, drawn up on the opposite side of the pavement.

Having left our coats with a servant, we were ushered upstairs, and, as the song was not yet ended, slipped in unannounced, and took up our places just between two crowded drawing-rooms, where, sheltered by the folds of a muslin curtain, we could see all that was going on in both. I observed, at a glance, that I was now in a society altogether unlike that which I had just left.

At Rachel's I had seen only two ladies besides herself, and those were members of her own family. Here there was, at least, an equal proportion of both sexes among the guests. At Rachel's a princely magnificence reigned. Here the rooms were elegant, but simple ; the paintings choice but few ; the ornaments costly, but in no unnecessary profusion.

"It is just the difference between taste and display," said Oliphant, to whom I had made some remark upon the subject. "Rachel is an actress, and Madame d'Argenteuil is a lady. Rachel displays her riches as an Indian chief the scalps of his victims, and Madame d'Argenteuil adorns her house with no other view than to make it attractive to her friends."

"As a Greek girl covers her head with sequins to show the amount of her fortune, and an English girl puts a rose

in her hair for grace and beauty only," said I, thinking, in my own mind that this was rather a clever observation, and considerably disappointed when Oliphant merely said, "just so." The lady standing up by the piano in the larger room here finished her *scena*, and returned to her seat, amid a shower of *bravas*.

"She sings exquisitely," said I, following her with my eyes, in the hope of discovering the mistress of the house.

"And so she ought," replied my friend. "She is the Countess Bossi, whom you may have heard of as Mademoiselle Sontag.

"What! the celebrated Sontag!" I exclaimed.

"The same. And the gentleman to whom she is now speaking...do you see which I mean? —that handsome man with such a profusion of rich curling hair; he is a no less famous a person than the author of *Pelham*."

I was as much delighted as a rustic at a menagerie, and Oliphant seeing this to be the case, continued to point out one celebrity after another, till I began no longer to remember which was which. Thus Lamartine, Horace Vernet, Scribe, Lord Carlisle, Baron Humboldt, Miss Cushman, Professor Arago, Felicien David, and Sir Edwin Landseer, were successively indicated, and I thought myself one of the most fortunate fellows in Paris, only to be allowed to look upon them.

"I suppose that the spirit of lion-hunting is innate in us all," I said, presently. "Call it vulgar excitement, if you will; but I must confess that to see these people, and be able to write about them to my father, is just the most satisfactory event that has happened to me in Paris."

"Call things by their right names, Damon," said Oliphant good-naturedly. "If you were a *parvenu* giving a party, and wanted all these fine folk to be seen at your house, it would be lion-hunting, but being whom and what you are, it is hero-worship—a disease peculiar to the young,—wholesome and inevitable, like the measles."

"What have I done," said a charming voice close by,

"that Captain Oliphant will not even deign to look upon me?"

The charming voice proceeded from the still more charming lips of an exceedingly pretty brunette in a dress of light green silk, fastened here and there with bouquets of rosebuds. Plump, rosy, black-haired, bright-eyed, and bewilderingly coquettish, this lady might have been about thirty years of age; perhaps rather more than less, and seemed by no means unconscious of her powers of fascination.

"I implore a thousand pardons, madame"—began my friend.

"*Comment!* A thousand pardons for a single offence!" exclaimed the lady. "What an unreasonable culprit!"

To which she added quite audibly, though behind the temporary shelter of her fan:—

"Who is this *beau garçon* whom you seem to have brought with you?"

I turned aside, affecting not to hear the question; but could not help listening, nevertheless. Of Oliphant's reply, however, I caught but my own name.

"So much the better," observed the lady. "I delight in civilising handsome boys. Introduce him."

Oliphant tapped me on the arm.

"Madame de Lannay permits me to introduce you, *mon ami*," said he. "Mr. Stanton Leigh—Madame de Lannay."

I bowed profoundly, all the more profoundly because I felt myself blushing to the eyes, and would not for the universe have been suspected of overhearing the preceding conversation—a condition of shyness which was by no means diminished when Oliphant announced his intention of going in search of Madame d'Argenteuil and of leaving me in the care of Madame de Lannay.

"Now, Damon, make the most of your opportunities," added he in an undertone, as he passed by. "*Vogue la galère!*"

*Vogue la galère*, indeed! As if I had anything to do

with the *galère*, except to sit down in it, the most timid of galley-slaves, and submit blindly to the gyves and chains of Madame de Lannay! She evidently considered me the lawful captive of her bow and spear, and carried me off at once to a vacant *causeuse* in a retired corner of the room.

To send me in search of a footstool, to make me hold her fan to overwhelm me with questions, and bewilder me wit a thousand nameless coquetries, were the immediate proceedings of Madame de Lannay. A consummate tactician, she succeeded, before a quarter of an hour had gone by, in putting me at my ease, and in less than another fifteen minutes had drawn from me everything that I had to tell—all my past, all my prospects for the future; the name and condition of my father, a description of Normandene, and even the very date of my birth. Then she criticised all the ladies in the room, which only drew my attention the more admiringly upon herself—and she quizzed all the young men, whereupon I felt indirectly flattered, without exactly knowing why—and she praised Oliphant in terms for which I could have embraced her on the spot had she been ten times less pretty, and ten times less fascinating. I was an easy victim, after all, and scarcely worth the powder and shot of an experienced general; but Madame de Lannay, according to her own confession, had a taste for civilising “handsome boys,” so I suppose that I came under that category a good many years ago, and the little victory amused her! By the time, at all events, that Oliphant returned to tell me it was past one o’clock in the morning, and I must be introduced to the mistress of the house before leaving, my head was as completely turned as that of old Time himself.

“Past one o’clock!” I exclaimed. “Impossible! We cannot have been here half-an-hour.”

At which neither Oliphant nor Madame de Lannay could forbear smiling, and so I blushed again, and wondered what *gaucherie* I had committed.

"I hope that our acquaintance is not to end here, monsieur," said Madame de Lannay. I live in the Rue de Courçelles, *numero* twelve, and am at home to my friends every Wednesday evening."

I bowed almost to my boots.

"And to my intimates, every morning from twelve to two," she added very softly, with a dimpled smile that went straight to my heart, and set it beating like the paddle wheels of a steamer.

I stammered some incoherent thanks, nearly upset a servant with a tray of ices in stepping back from my final salutation, and, covered with confusion, followed Oliphant into the other room. Here I was introduced to Madame d'Argenteuil, a pale, aristocratic woman some few years younger than Madame de Lannay, and received a gracious invitation to all her Monday receptions for the future. But I was much less interested in Madame d'Argenteuil than I could have believed a couple of hours before. I scarcely looked at her, and, five minutes after I was out of her presence, could not have told whether she was fair or dark, if my life had depended on it !

"What say you to walking home?" said Oliphant, as we resumed our wrapping coats and hats, in the hall below. "It is a superb night, and the fresh air will do us both good, after these hot rooms. I assented gladly, and we went out, arm in arm, along a labyrinth of quiet streets lighted by gas-lamps few and far between, and traversed only by a few homeward-bound pedestrians. Emerging presently at the back of the Madeleine, we paused for a moment to admire the noble building by moonlight, then struck across the Marché aux Fleurs, and took our way along the Boulevard.

"Are you tired, Leigh?" said Oliphant presently, after a long interval of silence.

"Not a bit," I replied, with my head full of Madame de Lannay.

"Would you like to look in at an artist's club close by

here, where I have the *entree*?—queer place enough, but amusing to a stranger.”

“ Yes, very much.”

“ Come along, then ; but, first of all, button up your overcoat to the throat, and tie this coloured scarf round your neck. See, I do the same. Now take off your gloves—that’s it. And give your hat the least possible inclination to the left ear. You may turn up the bottoms of your trousers, if you like—anything to look a little slangy.”

“ Is that necessary ?”

“ Indispensable—at all events in the honourable society of *Les Chicards*.”

“ *Les Chicards* !” I repeated. “ What are they ?”

“ It is the name of the club, and means—heaven only knows what, for Greek or Latin root it has none, and record of it there exists not, unless in the dictionary of Argot ! And yet if you were an old Parisian, and had matriculated for the last dozen years at the Bal de l’Opera, you would know the illustrious Chicard by sight as familiarly as Punch, or Paul Pry, or Pierrot. He is a gravely comic personage, with a bandage over one eye, a battered hat considerably inclining to the back of his head, a coat with a high collar and long tails, a *tout ensemble* indescribably seedy—something between a street preacher and a travelling showman. But here we are. Take care how you come down, and mind your head.”

Having turned aside, some few minutes before, into the Rue St. Honore, we had thence diverged down a narrow street with a gutter running along the middle, and no foot pavements on either side. The houses seemed to be nearly all shops, some few of which, for the retailing of *charbonnerie*, stale vegetables, uninviting cooked meats, and so forth, were still open ; but that before which we halted was closely shuttered up, with only a private door open at the side, lighted by a single oil-lamp. Following my friend for a couple of yards along the dim passage within, I became aware of strange sounds, proceeding apparently

from the bowels of the earth, and found myself at the head of a steep staircase, down which it was necessary to proceed with my body bent almost double, in consequence of the close proximity of the ceiling and the steps. At the foot of this staircase came another dim passage, and another oil-lamp over a low door, at which Oliphant paused a moment before entering. The sounds which I had heard above now solved themselves into their component parts, consisting of roars of laughter, snatches of songs, clinkings of glasses, and thumpings of bottles upon tables, to the accompaniment of a deep bass hum of conversation, all of which prepared me to find a very merry company within.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF LES CHICARDS.

"When a set of men find themselves agree in any particular, though never so trivial, they establish themselves into a kind of fraternity, and meet once or twice a week."

*Spectator.*

It was a long, low room lighted by gas, with a central table reaching from end to end. Around this table, in various stages of conviviality and conversation, were seated some thirty or forty men, capped, bearded, and eccentric-looking, with all kinds of queer blouses, turned over collars, and wonderful heads of hair. Sitting down, almost without being observed, at the lower end of this table, we called for a bottle of Chablis, lit our cigars, and fell in with the general business of the evening. At the top, showing dimly through a dense fog of tobacco smoke, sat a stout man in a green coat fastened by a belt round the waist. He appeared to be President, and, instead of a hammer, had a small bugle lying by his side, which he blew from time to time to command silence.

Somewhat perplexed by the general aspect of the club, I turned to my companion for an explanation.

"Is it possible," said I, "that these amazing individuals are all artists and gentlemen?"

"Artists, every one," replied Oliphant; "but as to their claim to be gentlemen, I won't undertake to establish it. After all, the *Chicards* are not first-rate men."

"What then?"

"Oh, the Helots of the profession—hewers of wood-engravings, and drawers of water-colours, with a sprinkling of daguerreotypists, and academy students. But hush; somebody is going to sing!"

And, heralded by a convulsive flourish from the President's bugle, a young *Chicard*, whose dilapidated outer man sufficiently contradicted the burthen of his song, shouted with better will than skill, a *chanson* of Beranger's, every verse of which ended with

" J'ai cinquante écus,  
J'ai cinquante écus,  
J'ai cinquante écus de rente !"

Having brought this performance to a satisfactory conclusion, the singer sat down amid great clapping of hands and clattering of glasses, and the President, with another flourish on the bugle, called upon one Monsieur Tourterelle. Monsieur Tourterelle was a tall, gaunt, swarthy personage, who appeared to have cultivated his beard at the expense of his head, since the former reached nearly to his waist, while the hair on the latter was no longer than a blacking brush. Preparing himself for the effort with a wine glass full of raw cognac, this gentleman leaned back in his chair, stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, fixed his eyes on the ceiling, and plunged at once into a doleful ballad all about one Mademoiselle Rosine, and a certain village *aupres de la mer*, which seemed to be in an indefinite number of verses, and amused no one but himself. In the midst of this ditty just as the audience had begun to testify their impatience by much whispering and shuffling of feet, an elderly *Chicard*, with a very bald and shiny head, was discovered to have fallen asleep in the seat next but one to my own; whereupon my nearest neighbour, a merry-looking, young fellow, with a profusion of rough light hair surmounted by a cap of scarlet cloth, forthwith charred a cork in one of the candles, and decorated the bald head of the sleeper with a comic countenance and a pair of huge mustachios. An uproarious burst of laughter was the immediate result, and the singer, interrupted somewhere about his eighteenth verse, subsided into offended silence.

"Monsieur Müller is requested to favour the honourable

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society with a song," cried the President, as soon as the tumult had somewhat subsided.

My red-capped neighbour, answering to that name, begged to be excused, on the score of having pledged his *ut de poitrine* a week since at the Mont de Piété, without yet having been able to redeem it. This apology was received with laughter, hisses, and general incredulity.

"But," he added, "I am willing to relate an adventure that happened to myself in Rome two winters ago, if my honourable brother *Chicards* will be pleased to hear it."

An immense burst of approbation from all but Monsieur Tourterelle and the bald sleeper, followed this announcement, and so, after a preliminary *grog au vin* and another explosive demonstration on the part of the chairman, Monsieur Müller thus began:—

#### THE STUDENT'S STORY.

"When I was in Rome, I lodged in the Via Margretta, which, for the benefit of those who have not been there, may be described as a street of studios and stables, crossed at one end by a little roofed gallery with a single window, like a shabby "Bridge of Sighs. A gutter runs down the middle, interrupted occasionally by heaps of stable-litter, and the perspective is damaged by rows of linen suspended across the street at uncertain intervals. The houses in this agreeable thoroughfare are dingy, dilapidated, and comfortless, and all which are not in use as stables, are occupied by artists. However, it was a very jolly place, and I never was happier anywhere in my life. I had but just touched my little patrimony, and I was acquainted with plenty of pleasant fellows, who used to come down to my rooms at night from the French Academy or from the Vatican where they had been studying all day. Ah, what evenings those were! What suppers we used to have in from *Lepri's*! What lots of Orvieto we drank, and what a mountain of empty wicker bottles had to be cleared away

at least, once in every ten days, from the little square yard with the solitary lemon tree at the back of the house!"

"Come, Müller—no fond memories!" cried a student in a holland blouse. "Get on with the story."

"Aye, get on with the story!" echoed several voices."

To which Müller, who took advantage of the interruption to finish his *grog au vin*, deigned no reply.

"Well," continued he, "like a good many other fellows who having everything to learn and nothing to do, fancy themselves great geniuses only because they are in Rome, I put a grand brass plate on the door, testifying to all passers by that mine was the **STUDIO DI HERR FRANZ MÜLLER**, and believed that my fortune was to be made out of hand. Nothing came of it, however. People in search of Dessoulavy's rooms knocked occasionally to ask their way, and a few English and Americans dropped in from time to time to stare about them, after the free and easy fashion of foreigners in Rome; but, for all this, I found no patrons. Thus several months went by, during which I studied from the life, worked hard at the antique, and relieved the monotony of study with occasional trips to Frascati or supper parties at the Café Greco."

"The story! the story!" interrupted a dozen impatient voices.

"All in good time," said Müller, with provoking indifference. "We are now coming to it."

And assuming an attitude expressive of mystery, he dropped his voice, looked round the table, and proceeded:

"It was on the last evening of the Carnival. It had been raining at intervals during the whole day, but held up for a good hour just at dusk, as if on purpose for the *moccoli*, which was, in consequence, all the more frantically gay. Scarcely, however, had the guns of St. Angelo thundered an end to the frolic, when the rain came down again in torrents, and put out the last tapers that yet lingered along the Corso. Wet, weary, and splashed from head to foot with mud and tallow, I came home about seven

o'clock, having to dine and dress before going to a masked-ball in the evening. To light my stove, change my wet clothes, and make the best of a half-cold *trattore* dinner, were my first proceedings; after which I laid out my costume ready to put on, wrapped myself in a huge cloak, swallowed a tumbler full of hot cognac and water, and lay down in front of the fire, determined to have a sound nap, and a thorough warming, before venturing out again that night. I fell asleep, of course, and never woke till roused by a tremendous peal upon the studio-bell, about two hours and a half afterwards. More dead than alive, I started to my feet. The fire had gone out in the stove, the room was in utter darkness, and the bell still pealed loud enough to raise the neighbourhood."

"Who's there?" I said, half-opening the door, through which the wind and rain came rushing in, "and what, in the name of ten thousand devils, do you want?"

"I want an artist," said my visitor, in Italian. "Are you one?"

"I flatter myself, yes," replied I, still holding the door tolerably close.

"Can you paint heads?"

"Heads, figures, landscapes, anything," said I, with my teeth chattering like castanets.

The stranger pushed the door open, walked in without further ceremony, closed it behind him, and said in a low, distinct voice,—

"Could you take the portrait of a dead man, if it were required of you?"

"Of a dead man?" I stammered. "I—I——Suppose I strike a light?"

The stranger laid his hand upon my arm.

"Not till you have given me an answer," said he; "Yes, or no? Remember, you will be well paid."

"Well, then—yes," I replied.

"And can you do it at once?"

"At once!"

"Aye, Signore, can you take your colours, and come with me this instant—or must I seek some other painter?"

I thought of the masked-ball, and sighed; but the promise of good payment, and, above all, the peculiarity of the adventure, determined me.

"Nay, if it is to be done," said I, "one time is as good as another. Let me strike a light, and I will at once pack up my colours and come with you."

"*Bene!*" said the stranger. "But be as quick as you can, Signore, for time presses."

"I was quick, you may be sure, and yet not so quick but that I found time to look at my strange visitor. He was a dark, elderly man dressed in a suit of plain black, and might have been a clerk, or a tradesman, or a confidential servant. As soon as I was ready, he took the lead, conducted me to a carriage which was waiting at the corner of a neighbouring street; sat down, respectfully, on the opposite seat, pulled up both the blinds, and gave the word to drive on. I never knew by what streets we went, or to what part of Rome he took me; but the way seemed long and intricate. At length we stopped, and alighted. The night was pitch-dark and still stormy. I saw before me only the outline of a large building, indistinct and gloomy, and a small open door dimly lighted from within. Hurried across the strip of narrow pavement, and shut in immediately, I had no time to ascertain localities—no choice except to follow my conductor, and blindly pursue the adventure to its close. Having entered by a back door, we went up and down a labyrinth of staircases and passages, for the mere purpose, as it seemed, of bewildering me as much as possible—than paused before an oaken door at the end of a corridor. Here my conductor desired me, by a gesture, to precede him.

"It was a large, panelled chamber, richly furnished. A wood-fire smouldered on the hearth—a curtained alcove to the left partly concealed a bed—a corresponding

alcove to the right, fitted with altar and crucifix, served as an oratory. In the centre of the room stood a table covered with a cloth. It needed no second glance to tell me what object lay beneath that cloth, uplifting it in ghastly outline! My conductor pointed to the table, and asked if there were anything I needed. To this I replied that I must have more light and more fire, and so proceeded to disembarass myself of my cloak, and prepare my palette. In the meantime, he threw on a log and some pine-cones, and went to fetch an additional lamp.

"Left alone with the body, and impelled by an irresistible impulse, I rolled back the cloth, and saw before me the corpse of a young man in a fancy dress—a magnificent fellow, cast in the very mould of strength and grace, and measuring his six feet, if an inch. The features were singularly handsome; the brow open and resolute; the hair dark, and crisp with curls. Looking more closely, I saw that a lock had been lately cut from the right temple, and found one of the severed hairs upon the cheek, where it had fallen. The dress was that of a jester of the middle ages, half scarlet and half white, with a rich belt round the waist. In this belt, as if in horrible mockery of the dead, was stuck a tiny baton surmounted by a fool's cap, and hung with silver bells. Looking down thus upon the body—so young, so beautiful, so evidently unprepared for death—a conviction of foul play flashed upon me with all the suddenness and certainty of revelation. Here were no appearances of disease, and no signs of strife. The expression was not that of a man who had fallen weapon in hand. Neither, it must be confessed, was it that of one who had died in the agony of poison. The longer I looked, the more mysterious it seemed, and the more I felt assured that there was guilt at the bottom of the mystery."

"While I was yet under the first confused and shuddering impression of this doubt, my guide came back with a powerful solar lamp, and, seeing me standing beside the body, said sharply :

"Well, Signore, you look as if you had never seen a dead man before in all your life!"

"I have seen plenty," I replied; "but never one so young and so handsome."

"He dropped down quite suddenly," said he, volunteering the information, "and died in a few minutes." Then finding that I remained silent, added—

"But I am told that it is always so in cases of heart-disease."

"I turned away without replying, and, having placed the lamp to my satisfaction, began rapidly sketching in my subject. My instructions were simple. I was to give the head only; to produce as rapid an effect with as little labour as possible; to alter nothing; to add nothing; and, above all, to be ready to leave the house before daybreak. So I set steadily to work, and my conductor, establishing himself in an easy-chair by the fire, watched my progress for some time, and then, as the night advanced, fell profoundly asleep. Thus, hour after hour went by, and absorbed in my work, I painted on, unconscious of fatigue—I might almost say with something of a morbid pleasure in the task before me. The silence within; the raving of the wind and rain without; the solemn mystery of death, and the still more solemn mystery of crime which, as I followed out train after train of wild conjectures, grew to still deeper conviction, had each and all their own terrible fascination. Was it not possible, I asked myself, by the mere force of will to penetrate the secret? Was it not possible to study that dead face till the springs of thought so lately stilled within the stricken brain should vibrate once more, if only for an instant, as wire vibrates to wire, and sound to sound? Could I not, by long studying of the passive mouth, compel some sympathetic revelation of the last word that it uttered, though that revelation took no outward form, and were communicable to the apprehension only? Pondering thus, I lost myself in occult paths of metaphysical enquiry, till the hand and the



brain worked independently of each other—the one swiftly reproducing upon canvas the outer lineaments of the dead ; the other labouring to retrace foregone facts of which no palpable evidence remained. Thus my work progressed ; thus the night waned ; thus the sleeper by the fireside stirred from time to time, or moaned at intervals in his dreams.

“At length, when many hours had gone by, and I began to be conscious of the first languor of sleeplessness, I heard, or fancied that I heard, a light sound in the corridor without. I held my breath, and listened. As I listened, it ceased—was renewed—drew nearer, and paused outside the door. Involuntarily, I rose and looked round for some means of defence, in case of need. Was I brought here to perpetuate the record of a crime, and was I, when my task was done, to be silenced in a dungeon, or a grave ? This thought flashed upon me almost before I was conscious of the horror it involved. At the same moment, I saw the handle of the door turned slowly and cautiously—then held back—and then, after a brief pause, the door itself gradually opening.”

Here the student paused as if overcome by the recollection of that moment, and passed his hand nervously across his brow. I took the liberty of pushing our bottle of Chablis towards him, for which he thanked me with a nod and a smile, and filled his glass to the brim.

“Well ?” cried two or three voices, eagerly ; my own being one of them. “The door opened—what then ?”

“And a lady entered,” continued he. “A lady dressed in black from head to foot, with a small lamp in her hand. Seeing me, she laid her finger significantly on her lip, closed the door as cautiously as she had opened it, and, with the faltering, uncertain steps of one just arisen from a sick bed, came over to where I had been sitting, and leaned for support against my chair. She was very pale, very calm, very young and beautiful, with just such a look of passive despair in her face as one sees in Guido’s portrait of Beatrice Cenci. Standing thus, I observed that she kept

her eyes resolutely turned away from the corpse, and her attention concentrated on the portrait. So several minutes passed, and neither of us spoke or stirred—then, slowly, shudderingly, she turned, grasped me by the arm, pointed to the dead form stretched upon the table, and, less with her breath than by the motion of her lips, shaped out the one word—

*“Murdered!”*

“Stunned by this confirmation, I could only clasp my hands in mute horror, and stare helplessly from the lady to the corpse, from the corpse to the sleeper. Wildly, feverishly, with all her calmness turned to eager haste, she then bent over the body, tore open the rich doublet, turned back the shirt, and, without uttering one syllable, pointed to a tiny puncture just above the region of the heart—a spot so small, so insignificant, such a mere speck upon the marble, that but for the pale violet discolouration which spread round it like a halo, I could scarcely have believed it to be the cause of death. The wound had evidently bled inwardly, and, being inflicted with some singularly slender weapon, had closed again so completely as to leave an aperture no larger than might have been caused by the prick of a needle. While I was yet examining it, the fire fell together with some slight sound, and my conductor stirred uneasily in his sleep. To cover the body hastily with the cloth and resume my seat, was, with me, the instinctive work of a moment; but he was quiet again the next instant, and breathing heavily. With trembling hands, my visitor next re-closed the shirt and doublet, replaced the outer covering, and, bending down till her lips almost touched my ear, whispered—

“You have seen it—if called upon to do so, will you swear it?”

I promised.

“You will not be intimidated by threats? nor bribed by gold? nor lured by promises?”

“Never, so help me heaven!”

"She looked into my eyes, as if she would read my very heart; then, before I knew what she was about to do, seized my hand, and pressed it to her lips."

"I believe you," she said. "I believe, and I thank you. Not a word to him that you have seen me"—here she pointed to the sleeper by the fire. "He is faithful; but not to my interests alone. I dare tell you not more—at all events, not now! Heaven bless, and reward you. In this portrait you give me the only treasure—the only consolation, of all my future!"

"So saying she took a ring from her own finger; pressed it, without another word, into my unwilling hand, and, with the same passive dreary look that her face had worn on first entering, took up her lamp again, and glided from the room.

"How the next hour, or half hour, went by, I know not—except that I sat before the canvas like one dreaming. Now and then, I added a few touches; but mechanically; and as it were, in a trance of wonder and dismay. I had, however, made such good progress before being interrupted, that when my companion woke, and told me that it would soon be day, and I must now make haste to be gone, the portrait was even more finished than I had myself hoped to make it in the time. So I packed up my colours and palette again, and while I was doing so, observed that he not only drew the cloth once more over the features of the dead, but concealed the likeness in the oratory, and even restored the displaced chairs to their old positions against the wall. This done, he extinguished the solar lamp; put it on a bureau in the corner, out of sight, desired me once more to follow him; and led the way back along the same labyrinth of staircases and corridors by which he brought me. It was grey dawn as he hurried me into the coach. The blinds were already up—the door was instantly closed—again we seemed to be going through an infinite number of streets—again we stopped, and I found myself at the corner of the Via Margretta."

"Alight, Signore," said the stranger speaking for the first time since we started. "Alight—you are but a few yards from your own door. Here are a hundred scudi; and all that you have now to do, is to forget your night's work, as if it had never been."

"With this he closed the carriage door, the horses dashed on again, and, before I had time even to see if any arms were blazoned on the panels, the whole equipage had disappeared.

"And here, strange to say, the adventure ended. I never was called upon for evidence. I never saw anything more of the stranger, or the lady. I never heard of any sudden death, or accident, or disappearance having taken place about that time, and I never even obtained any clue to the neighbourhood of the house in which these things took place. Often and often afterwards, when I was strolling by night along the streets of Rome, I lingered before some old palazzo, and fancied that I recognised the gloomy outline that caught my eye in that hurried transit from the carriage to the house. Often and often I paused and started, thinking that I had found at last the very side-door by which I entered. But these were mere guesses, after all. Perhaps that house stood in some remote quarter of the city where my footsteps never went again—perhaps in some neighbouring street, or piazza, where I passed it every day! At all events the whole thing vanished like a dream, and, but for the ring and the hundred scudi, a dream I should by this time believe it to have been. The scudi, I am sorry to say, were spent within a month—the ring I have never parted from, and here it is."

Hereupon the student took from his finger a superb ruby set between two brilliants of inferior size, and allowed it to pass from hand to hand, all round the table. Exclamations of surprise and admiration, accompanied by all sorts of conjectures and comments, immediately broke forth in every direction.

"The dead man was the lady's lover," said one. "That is why she wanted his portrait."

"Of course, and her husband had murdered him," added another.

"Who, then, was the man in black?" asked a third.

"A servant, to be sure," replied a fourth. "She said, if you remember, that he was faithful; but not devoted to her interests alone. That meant that he would obey her to the extent of procuring for her the portrait of her lover; but that he did not choose to betray his master, even though a murderer."

"But, if this were so, where was the master?" said the speaker.

"Is it likely that he would have neglected to conceal the body during all those hours? Is it likely that he would have left our friend free to pursue his work all the night long without discovery?"

"Certainly. Nothing more likely, if he were a man of the world and knew how to play his game out boldly to the end. Have we not been told that it was the last night of the Carnival, and what better could he do, to avert suspicion, than show himself at as many balls as he could visit in the course of the evening? But really, this ring is magnificent!"

"Superb. The ruby alone must be worth a thousand francs."

"To say nothing of the diamonds, and the setting," observed the next to whom it was handed.

At length, after having gone nearly the complete round, it came to a little, dark, sagacious-looking man, just one seat beyond Oliphant's, who peered at it suspiciously on every side, breathed upon it, rubbed it bright again upon his coat sleeve, and finally, held the stones up sideways between his eyes and the light.

"Bah!" said he, sending it, with a contemptuous fillip of the forefinger and thumb, to its owner at the opposite side of the table. "Glass and paste, *mon ami*. Not worth five francs of anybody's money."

Müller, who had been eyeing him all the time with an odd smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, emptied his last drop of Chablis, turned the glass over on the table, bottom upwards, and said very coolly—

“ Well, I’m sorry for that ; because I gave ten for it myself this morning, in the Palais Royale.

“ You ! ”

“ Ten francs ! ”

“ Bought in the Palais Royale ! ”

“ What does he mean ? ”

“ Mean ! ” echoed the student, in reply to the chorus of exclamations. “ I mean simply that I bought it this morning, and gave ten francs for it. It is not every morning of my life, let me tell you, that I have ten francs to throw away on my personal appearance ! ”

“ But then the ring that the lady took from her finger ? ”

“ And the murder ? ”

“ And the servant in black ? ”

“ And the hundred scudi ? ”

“ One great invention from beginning to end, Messieurs les Chicards, and being got up expressly for your amusement, I hope you liked it. *Garçon !*—another *grog au vin*, and sweeter than the last ! ”

It would have been difficult to say whether the Chicards were more disappointed or delighted at this *dénouement*—disappointed at its want of fact, or delighted at the story-weaving power of Herr Franz Müller. They expressed themselves, at all events, with a tumultuous burst of applause, in the midst of which we rose and left the room. When we once more emerged into the open air, the stars had disappeared, a light mist was falling, and the air was laden with the chill damp of approaching daybreak. Fortunately we met an empty *fiacre* in the next street, and, as we were nearer the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre than the Chaussee d’Antin, Oliphant set me down first.

“ Adieu, Damon,” he said, laughingly, as we shook hands through the window. “ If we don’t meet before,

come and dine with me next Sunday at seven o'clock—and don't dream of dreadful murders, if you can help it!"

I did not dream of dreadful murders. I dreamt, instead, of Madame de Launay, and never woke the next morning till eleven o'clock, just two hours later than the time at which I should have presented myself at Dr. Lucet's.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT IT IS TO BE A CAVALIERE SERVENTE.

" Everye white will have its blacke !  
And everye sweet its sowre."

*Ancient Ballad.*

NEITHER the example of Harold Oliphant, nor the broad-cloth of the great Michaud himself, did half so much for my education as Madame de Launay. Having once made up her mind to civilize me, she spared no pains for the accomplishment of that end, cost what it might to herself—or me. Before I had been for one week her subject, she taught me how to bow ; how to pick up a pocket-handkerchief ; how to present a bouquet ; how to hold a fan ; how to pay a compliment ; how to turn over the leaves of a song—in short, how to obey and anticipate every imperious wish, and how to fetch and carry, like a dog. My vassalage began from the very day when I first ventured to call upon her. Her house was small, but very elegant, and she received me in a delicious little room overlooking the Champs Elysées—a very nest of flowers, books, and birds. Before I had breathed the air of that fatal boudoir for one quarter of an hour, I was as abjectly her slave as the poodle with the rose-coloured collar which lay curled upon a velvet cushion at her feet.

" I shall elect you my *cavaliers servente*," said she, after I had twice nervously risen to take my leave within the first half hour, and twice been desired to remain a little longer. " Will you accept the office ? "

I thought it the greatest privilege under heaven. Perhaps I said so.

" The duties of the situation are onerous," added she, " and I ought not to accept your allegiance without setting them before you. In the first place, you will have to



bring me every new novel by George Sand, or Balzac, or Charles de Bernard, on the day of publication."

"I will move heaven and earth to get them the day before, if that be all!" I exclaimed.

Madame de Launay nodded approvingly, and went on telling off my duties, one by one, upon her pretty fingers.

"You will have to accompany me to the Opera at least twice in every week, on which occasions you will bring me a bouquet—camelias being my favourite flowers."

"Were they the flowers that bloom but once in a century," said I, with more enthusiasm than sense, "they should be yours!"

Madame de Launay smiled, and nodded again.

"When I drive in the Bois, you will sometimes take a seat in my carriage, and sometimes ride beside it, like an attentive cavalier."

I was just about to avow that I had no horse, when I remembered that I could borrow Oliphant's or hire one, if necessary; so I checked myself, and bowed.

"When I visit an exhibition," said Madame de Launay, "it will be your business to look out the pictures in the catalogue—when I walk, you will carry my parasol—when I go into a shop, you must take care of the dog—when I embroider, you will wind off my silks, and look for my scissors—when I want amusement, you must make me laugh—and when I am sleepy, you must read to me. In short, my *cavaliere servente* must be my shadow."

"Then, like your shadow, Madame," said I, "his place is ever at your feet, and that is all that I desire!"

Madame de Launay laughed outright, and showed the loveliest little double row of pearls in all the world.

"Admirable!" said she. "Quite an elegant compliment, and worthy of an accomplished lady-killer! *Allons!* you are a promising scholar!"

"In all that I have dared to say, Madame, I am, at least, sincere," I added, abashed at the kind of praise, and colouring beneath her glance.

"Sincere? Of course you are. Who ever doubted it? Nay, if you blush in that fashion it were enough to ruin the effect of the finest compliment ever uttered. There—it is three o'clock, and at half-past I have an engagement, for which I must now make my *toilette*. Come to-morrow evening to my box at the *Italiens*, and so adieu. Stay—being my *cavaliere*, I permit you, at parting, to kiss my hand."

Trembling, breathless, scarcely daring to touch it with mine, I lifted the soft little hand to my lips, stammered something which was, no doubt, sufficiently foolish, and hurried away, as if I were treading on air, and breathing sunshine. All the rest of that day went by in a kind of agreeable delirium. I walked about, almost without knowing where I went. I talked without exactly knowing what I said. I have some recollection of marching to and fro among the side alleys of the Bois de Boulogne, which at that time was really a woody park, and not a pleasure garden—of lying under a tree, and listening to the birds overhead, and indulging myself in some idiotic romance about love, and solitude, and Madame de Launay—of wandering into a *restaurant* somewhere about seven o'clock, and sitting down to a dinner for which I had no appetite—of going back, some time during the evening, to the Rue de Courcelles, and walking to and fro on the opposite side of the way, looking up for ever so long, at the darkened windows where my divinity did not show herself—of coming back to my lodgings, weary, dusty, and not a bit more sober, somewhere about eleven o'clock at night, driven to bed by sheer fatigue, and, even then, too much in love to go to sleep! The next day I went through my duties at Dr. Lucet's, and attended an afternoon lecture at the hospital; but mechanically, like one dreaming. In the evening, I presented myself at the Opera, where Madame de Launay received me very graciously, and deigned to accept a superb bouquet for which I had paid sixteen francs. I found her surrounded by

elegant men, who looked upon me as nobody, and treated me accordingly. Driven to the back of the box, where I could neither speak to her, nor see the stage, nor achieve even a glimpse of the house, I spent an evening which, certainly, fell short of my anticipations. I had, however, the gratification of seeing my bouquet thrown to Grisi at the end of the second act, and was permitted the privilege of going in search of Madame de Launay's carriage, while somebody else handed her down stairs, and assisted her with her cloak. A whispered word of thanks, a tiny pressure of the hand, and the words "come and call upon me early to-morrow," compensated me, nevertheless, for all, and sent me home as blindly happy as ever.

The next day I called upon her, according to command, and was transported to the seventh heaven by receiving permission to accompany her to a morning concert, whereby I missed two lectures, and spent ten francs for my ticket.

On the Sunday, having hired a good horse for the occasion, I had the honour of riding beside her carriage till some better mounted acquaintances came to usurp my place and her attention after which I was forced to drop behind, and bear the eclipse of my glory as philosophically as I could.

Thus day after day went by, and, for the delusive sake of Madame de Launay's bright eyes, I neglected my studies, spent my money, wasted my time, and incurred the displeasure of Dr. Lucet. Led on from folly to folly, I was perpetually buoyed up by coqueties which meant nothing, and as perpetually mortified, disappointed, and neglected. I hoped ; I feared ; I fretted ; I lost my sleep and my appetite ; I felt dissatisfied with all around me, sometimes blaming myself, and sometimes her—yet ready to excuse and forgive her every shortcoming, on the smallest notice. A boy in experience even more than in years, I loved with a boy's headlong passion, and suffered with all a boy's acute susceptibility. I was intensely sensitive to shame,

abashed by a slight, humbled by a glance, and so easily wounded that there were often times when, seeing myself forgotten, I could with difficulty drive back the tears that kept rising to my eyes. On the other hand, I was as easily elated. A kind word, an encouraging smile, a lingering touch upon my sleeve, was at any time enough to compensate me for every previous suffering. How often the mere gift of a flower sent me home rejoicing! How the tiniest show of preference set my heart beating! How proud I was if mine were the arm chosen to lead her to her carriage! How, more than happy, if allowed, for even one half hour in the whole evening, to occupy the seat beside her own! To dangle after her the whole day—to traverse all Paris on her errands—to wait upon her pleasure, like a slave, and this, too, without even the desire to be thanked for my devotion, seemed the most natural thing in the world. She was capricious; but caprice became her. She was exacting; but her exactions were so coquettish and attractive, that one would not have wished her more reasonable. She was, at least, ten or twelve years my senior; but boys proverbially fall in love with women older than themselves, and this one was in all respects so charming, that I do not, even now, wonder at the extent of my infatuation.

After all, there are few things under heaven more beautiful, or more touching, than a boy's first love.

Passionate is it as a man's—pure as a woman's—trusting as a child's—timid, through the very excess of its unselfishness—chivalrous, as though handed down direct from the days of old romance—and poetical beyond the utterances of the poet. To the boy, lover, his mistress is something less than a divinity, and something more than woman. He believes in her truth as in his own; in her purity, as in the sun at noon. Her practised arts of voice and manner are, in his eyes, the unstudied graces that spring as naturally from her beauty as the scent from the flower. Single-hearted himself, it seems impossible

that she, whom he adores, should trifle with the most sacred sentiment that he has ever known. Conscious of his own devotion, he cannot conceive that all his wealth is poured forth in vain, and that he is but the plaything of her idle hours. Yet so it is too often. The boy's first love is almost always misplaced, seldom rated at its true value, and hardly ever productive of aught but disappointment. Aspirant of the highest mysteries of the soul, he passes through the ordeal of fire and tears, happy if he keep his faith unshaken; and his heart pure, for the wiser worship hereafter. We all know this, and few better than myself; yet, with all its suffering, which of us would choose to obliterate that early chapter of passionate delusion? Which of us would be without the memory of its smiles and tears, its sunshine and its clouds? Not I certainly.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### A CONTRETEMPS IN A CARRIAGE.

My slavery lasted somewhat longer than three weeks, and somewhat less than a month—which was quite long enough, both for my patience and my purse—and was brought, curiously enough, to an abrupt conclusion. This was how it happened.

I had, as usual, attended Madame de Launay one evening to the Opera, and found myself, also as usual, neglected for a host of others. There was one man, in particular, whom I hated, and whom (perhaps because I hated him) she distinguished rather more than the rest. His name was Chapuis, and he called himself Monsieur le Comte de Chapuis. Most likely he was a Count—I have no reason to doubt his title; but I chose to doubt it for mere spite, and because he was loud, and conceited, and wore a little red and green ribbon in his button-hole. He had, besides, an offensive sense of my youth and his own superiority, which I have never forgiven to this day. On the particular occasion of which I am now speaking, this person had made his appearance in Madame de Launay's box at the close of the first act, established himself in the seat behind hers, and there held the lists against all comers during the remainder of the evening. Everything that he said, everything that he did, aggravated me. When he looked through her lorgnette I loathed him. When he admired her fan, I longed to thrust it down his throat. When he held her bouquet to his odious nose (the bouquet that I had given her!) I felt that it would have been justifiable manslaughter to take him up bodily, and pitch him over into the pit. At length the performance came to a close, and M. de Chapuis, having taken upon himself to arrange Madame de Launay's cloak, carry Madame de Launay's fan, and

put Madame de Launay's opera-glass into its morocco-case, completed his officiousness by offering his arm, and conducting her into the lobby, whilst I, outwardly indifferent and inwardly boiling, dropped behind, and consigned him silently to all the torments of the seven circles.

It was an impressive autumnal night, without a star in the sky, and so still that one might have carried a lighted taper through the streets. Finding it thus warm, Madame de Launay proposed walking down the line of carriages, instead of waiting till her own came up, and so they led the way, and I followed. Having found the carriage, M. de Chapuis assisted her in, placed her fan and bouquet on the opposite seat, lingered a moment at the open door, and had the unparalleled audacity to raise her hand to his lips at parting. As for me, I stood proudly back, and lifted my hat.

"*Comment !*" said she, holding out her hand—the pretty, ungloved hand that had just been kissed—"is that your good night?"

I bowed over the hand. I would not have touched it with my lips at that moment for all the wealth of Paris.

"You are coming to me to-morrow morning at twelve?" she murmured tenderly.

"If Madame desires it."

"Of course, I desire it. I am going to Auteuil, to look at a house for a friend—and to Pignot's for some flowers—and to Lubin's for some scent—and to a host of places. What should I do without you? Nay, why that grave face? Have I done anything to offend you?"

"Madame, I—I confess that—"

"That you are jealous of that absurd Chapuis who is so much in love with himself that he has no place in his heart for any one else! *Fi donc !* I am ashamed of you. There—adieu, twelve to-morrow!"

And with this she laughed, waved her hand, gave the signal to drive on, and left me looking after the carriage, still irritable, but already half consoled.

“What an exquisite smile she has!” I thought to myself, as I sauntered moodily on. “Would that she were less lavish of it! and what a delicious little hand! Ah, if mine were the only lips permitted to kiss it! Why is she so charming?—or why, being so charming, need she prize the attentions of every coxcomb who has only enough wit to admire her? Pshaw! she is fond of admiration—’tis said that all women are, and I suppose she is no wiser than her sex. What a fool I am to believe that she cares more for my devotion than for another’s! Do I believe it? Yes—no—sometimes; but then it is when I am under the immediate influence of her presence. She fascinates me, but she fascinates twenty others in precisely the same way, and delights to do so. Yet I do think that she loves me! She accepts from me more devotion, more worship, more time, more outward and visible homage than from any other. Am I not her *Cavalier servante*? Does she not accept my bouquets? Did she not say the other day when I gave her that volume of Tennyson that she loved all that was English for my sake? Surely, I am worse than ungrateful, when, having so much, I am still dissatisfied! Why am I not the happiest fellow in Paris? Why ——”

But my meditations were interrupted at this moment by a sudden flash of very vivid lightning, followed, at some little interval, by a low muttering of distant thunder. I paused, and looked round. The sky was darker than ever, and, though the atmosphere was singularly torpid, I could hear that stealthy rustling among the uppermost leaves of the tall trees that generally precedes a storm. Unfortunately for myself, I had not felt disposed to go home at once on leaving the theatre; but, being restless alike in mind and body, and believing that a walk would do me good, had struck down through the Place Vendome, and up the Rue de Rivoli, intending to come home by a circuitous route. At this precise moment I found myself in the middle of the Place de la Concorde, with Cleopatra’s needle towering above my head, the lamps in the Champs



Elysées twinkling in long chains of light through the blank darkness before me, and scarcely a vehicle anywhere in sight. To be caught here in a heavy shower, was not, certainly, an agreeable prospect for one who had just emerged from the opera in the thinnest of boots and the lightest of folding hats, with neither umbrella nor paletot of proof; so, having given a hasty glance in every direction from which a cab might be expected, and seeing only private carriages hastening homewards, or public conveyances already occupied, I took valiantly to my heels, and made straight for the Madeleine. Long before I had accomplished half the distance, however, another flash announced the quick coming of the tempest, and the first premonitory drops began to plash down heavily upon the pavement. Still I ran on, thinking that I should find a cab in the Place de Madeleine; but the Place de Madeleine was empty—even the café at the corner was closed—even the omnibus office was shut up, and the red lamp above the door extinguished. What was I to do now? Panting and breathless, I leaned up against a doorway, and resigned myself to fate. Stay, what was that file of carriages, dimly seen through the rain which was now coming down in earnest? It was in a private street opening off at the back of the Madeleine—a street in which I could remember no public stand. Perhaps there was an evening party at one of the large houses lower down, and, if so, I might surely find a not wholly incorruptible cabman, who would consent, for a liberal *pour-boire* to drive me home, and keep his fare waiting, if need were, for one little half hour! At all events, it was worth the effort, so away I darted again, with the wind whistling about my ears, and the rain driving in my face. But my troubles were not to be so speedily ended. Among the twenty-five or thirty equipages which I found stationed together, there was not one hackney vehicle. All were private, and all, of course, inaccessible.

Did I say inaccessible?

A bold idea occurred to me. The rain was so heavy

that it could scarcely be expected to last many minutes—the carriage at the very extremity of the line was not likely to be the first in requisition, and, even if it were, the horses would take some little time to thread their way to the door, among so many others—one could spring out in a moment, if necessary, and—and, in short, the very daring of the deed was as attractive as the shelter! I made my way swiftly down the line. The last vehicle was a neat little Clarence, and the coachman, almost hidden by his umbrella and railway wrapper, was too much absorbed in the care of himself and his horses to pay much attention to a foot-passenger. I passed boldly by—doubled back stealthily on my own steps—opened the door cautiously—looked round to see if any one were observing me, and glided in.

It was a delightfully comfortable little vehicle—cushioned, soft, yielding, and pervaded withal by that delicate atmosphere of flowers and perfumes which lingers in the wake of ladies and their bouquets. Wondering whom the owner might be—if she were young—if she were pretty—if she were, perchance, any of those whom I had of late been in the habit of meeting—I settled myself in the darkest corner of the carriage, intending only to remain there till the rain had abated. Thus I fell—as fate would have it—first into a profound reverie, and then (lulled, perhaps, by the luxurious cushions, and the pleasant sense of shelter) into a still profounder sleep. How long this sleep may have lasted I know not; I only remember being slowly conscious of a gentle movement, which, without awaking, partly roused me—of a check to that movement, which brought my thoughts suddenly to the surface—of a stream of light—of an open door, a crowded hall, a lady waiting to come out, and a little crowd of attentive beaux surrounding her!

I comprehended my position in an instant, but not the means of extrication. To get out next the house was impossible, whilst at the opposite side I found myself blocked

up by carriages. With discovery on the one hand, and danger on the other, I shrank back; I would have gone through the bottom of the carriage, if I could, and to my horror, beheld the coachman stoop down and open the door. At the same instant the lady ran forward, sprang lightly in, recoiled, and uttered a little breathless cry of surprise and apprehension!

"*Mon Dieu !* Madame, what is it? Are you hurt?" cried two or three of the gentlemen at once, running out, bareheaded, to her assistance.

But to my bewilderment, the lady disengaged her mantle from her shoulders, and threw it over me in such a manner as to leave me completely hidden beneath the folds.

"Oh, nothing, thank you, I stepped upon my cloak, and feared to fall. How foolishly nervous! I am really quite ashamed to have alarmed you;—a thousand thanks—good night?"

And so, with something of a slight tremor in her voice, the lady closed the door and drew up the window. The next instant I felt the carriage in motion.

And now, what was to be done? I blessed the accident which rendered me invisible; but, at the same time asked myself how all this was to end?

Should I wait till she reached her own door, and then, still feigning sleep, allow myself to be discovered? Or should I take the bull by the horns, and reveal myself? If the latter, would she scream, faint, go into hysterics! Then, again, supposing that she chose to resume her cloak ..... a cold damp broke out upon my forehead at the mere thought! All at once, just as these questions flashed across my mind, the lady drew the mantle aside, and said—

"How imprudent of you to hide in my carriage!"

I could not believe my ears.

"Have you no prudence?—no fear of compromising me. Happily for us both, I had the presence of mind to cover

you with my cloak ; otherwise—*Ah, ça !* You always were the rashest of lovers !”

It was now plain that I was mistaken for some one else. Fortunately, the carriage lamps were unlit, the windows still blurred with rain, and the night intensely dark ; so, feeling like a wretch reprieved on the scaffold, I shrank farther and farther into the corner, glad to favour a mistake which promised the means of escape.

“*Eh bien !*” said the lady, half tenderly, and half reproachfully, “ have you nothing to say to me ?”

Say to her, indeed ! what could I say to her ? would not my very voice betray me directly ?

“ Ah,” continued she, without giving time for a reply ; “ you are ashamed of the cruel scene of yesterday ; well, since you have come on purpose to acknowledge your error—since you have not allowed the night to pass without seeking a reconciliation, I suppose I must forgive you !”

I thought, at this point, that I could not do better than press her hand, which was deliciously soft and small—softer and smaller than even Madame de Launay’s !

“ Naughty Gustave !” murmured my companion. “ Confess, now, that you were unreasonable !”

I sighed heavily, and caressed the little hand with both of mine. “ And you are very penitent ?”

I expressed my penitence by another prodigious sigh, and ventured, this time, to kiss the tips of the dainty fingers.

“ *Ah Mon Dieu !*” exclaimed the lady. “ You have shaved off your beard ; what can have induced you to do such a thing ?”

My beard, indeed ! This to me, when I would have given any money for even a moustache ! Besides, the fatal moment was come when I must speak ? “ *Mon cher ange—*” I began, trying a hoarse whisper—“ I—I the fact is—a bet. —”

“ A bet indeed !” repeated she, impatiently. “ The idea of sacrificing such a handsome beard for an idle bet ! I

never heard of anything so foolish. But how hoarse you are, Gustave ! ”

“ All within the last hour,” whispered I. “ I was caught in the storm, just now, and——”

“ And have taken cold, for my sake ! Alas ! my poor, dear friend, why did you wait to speak to me ? Why did you not go home at once, and change your clothes ? Your sleeve, I declare, is still quite damp ! Gustave, if you fall ill, I shall never forgive myself ! ”

I kissed her hand again. It was much pleasanter than whispering, and expressed all that was necessary.

“ But you have not asked once for poor Bibi ! ” exclaimed my companion, after a momentary silence. “ Poor, dear Bibi, who has been suffering a martyrdom with her cough all the afternoon ! ”

Now, who the deuce was Bibi ? She might be a baby—or, who could tell ?—she might be a poodle ! On this point, however, I was left uninformed ; for my unknown friend, who, luckily, seemed fond of talking, and had a great many things to say, launched off into another topic immediately.

“ After all,” said she, “ I should have been wrong not to go to the party ! My uncle was evidently pleased with my compliance, and it will not do to vex one’s rich uncles, if one can help it—will it, Gustave ? ”

I pressed her hand again.

“ Besides, Monsieur Chapuis was not there. He was not even invited ; so, you see, how far they were from laying match-making plots, and how groundless were all your fears and reproaches ! ”

Monsieur Chapuis ! Could this be the Chapuis of my special aversion ? I pressed her hand again, more closely, more tenderly, and listened for what might come next.

“ Well, well, it is all over now ! And will you promise never, never, never to be jealous again ? Then to be jealous of such a creature as that ridiculous Chapuis—a man who knows nothing, and who can think and talk only of his

own absurd self!—a man who has not even wit enough to see that every one laughs at him!”

I was delighted. I longed to embrace her on the spot! Was there ever such a charming, sensible, lively creature?

“Besides, the coxcomb is just now devoting himself, body and soul (such as they are!) to that insufferable little *intrigante*, Madame de Launay—publishing their *liaisons*, in fact, as openly as he dare, in every drawing-room and theatre throughout Paris. For my part, I am amazed that any woman of the world should suffer herself to be compromised to that extent. She has had enough experience in these affairs, one would think, to know a little better how to conceal them!”

Madame de Launay! Compromised—experienced—*intrigante*! My head swam, and my hands and feet became as cold as ice.

“To be sure, there is that poor English lad whom she drags about with her, to play propriety,” continued she; “but do you suppose the world is to be blinded by so shallow an artifice?”

“What English lad?” I asked, startled out of all sense of precaution, and desperately resolved to learn all that was to be told.

“What English lad! Why, Gustave, you are more stupid than ever! Don’t you remember how I pointed him out to you the other night at the Comedie Française—a pale, handsome boy, of about nineteen or twenty, with brown curling hair, and very fine eyes, which he hardly once took from the face of Madame de Launay during the entire evening. Poor fellow! I cannot help pitying him.”

“Then—then, you think she really does not love him?” I said—and this time my voice was hoarse enough, without any need of feigning.

“Love him? Ridiculous! What does such a woman understand by love? Certainly not the sentiment, nor the poetry of it! Tush, Gustave! I do not wish to be censorious; but everyone knows that ever since M. de Launay

has been away in Algiers, that woman has had, not one lover, but a dozen ; and now that her husband is coming back——”

“ Coming back ! —— her husband ! ” I echoed, half rising in my place, and falling back again, as if stunned. “ My God ! is she not a widow ? ”

It was now the lady's turn to be startled.

“ A widow ! ” she repeated. “ Why, you know as well I that——good heavens ! To whom am I speaking ? ” “ Are you—are you ?——”

“ Madame,” I said, as steadily as my agitation would let me, “ I beg you not to be alarmed. I am not, it is true, the person whom you have supposed ; but—nay, I implore you ——”

Terrified almost beyond control, she had here uttered a quick cry, and darted forward for the check-string. Arresting her hand half way, respectfully but firmly, I went on—

“ How I came here, I will explain presently. I am a gentleman, and upon the word of a gentleman, Madame, am innocent of any desire to offend or alarm you. Can you, will you hear me for one moment ? ”

“ I appear, sir, to have no alternative,” replied she, trembling like a caged bird.

“ I might have left you undeceived, Madame—I might have extricated myself from this painful position undiscovered—but for some words which just escaped your lips ; some words so nearly concerning the—the honour and happiness of—of—in short, I lost my presence of mind, and I now implore you to tell me if all that you have just been saying of Madame de Launay is literally true.”

“ Who are you, sir, that you should have dared to surprise confidences intended for another, and by what right do you question me ? ” said the lady, haughtily.

“ By the right of the suffering,” I replied, fairly breaking into sobs, and burying my face in my hands. “ I am that Englishman whom—whom ——”

There was an interval of painful silence, broken at length by my companion.

"Poor boy!" she said, and her voice, now, was gentle and compassionate. "You have been too rudely undeceived. Can it be possible that Madame de Launay passed herself off upon you for a widow?"

"She—she never named her husband to me—she knew I believed him dead!"

"And you never asked any one?"

"Never. Why should I?"

"Monsieur de Launay holds a government appointment in Algiers, and has been absent these last three or four years. He is, I understand, expected back shortly, on leave of absence."

I conquered my agitation by a supreme effort.

"Madame," I said, bravely, "I thank you. It now only remains for me to explain my intrusion. I can do so in half a dozen words. Caught in the storm, and unable to find a conveyance, I sought shelter in this carriage, which being the last on the file, offered the only refuge of which I could avail myself unobserved. While waiting for the tempest to abate, I fell asleep, and but for the chance which led you to mistake me for another, I must have been discovered when you entered the carriage."

"Then, finding yourself so mistaken, sir would it not have been more honourable to undeceive me than to usurp a conversation which——"

"Madame, I dared not. I feared to alarm you—I hoped to find some means of escape, and——"

"*Mon Dieu!* what means? How are you to escape, as it is, without compromising me? How leave the carriage without being seen by my servants?"

I had not thought of this, or of the dilemma in which my presence must place her.

"I can open the door softly," said I, "and jump out unperceived."



"Jump out! impossible, at the pace we are going. You would break your neck!"

I shook my head, and laughed bitterly.

"Have no fear of that, Madame," I said. "Those who least value their necks, never happen to break them. See, I can spring out as we pass the next turning, and be out of sight in a moment."

"Indeed, I will not permit it. Oh, dear, we have already reached the Faubourg St. Germain! Stay, I have an idea! Do you know what o'clock it is?"

"I don't know how long I may have slept; but I think it can hardly be later than two."

"*Bien!* The Countess de Blois has a ball to-night, and her visitors are sure not to disperse before three. My sister is there. I will ask to see her, and when my carriage stops, you can slip out. Here is the Rue de Bac, and the door of her hotel is yet surrounded with equipages."

And, with this, she let down a front window, desired the coachman to stop, leaned forward so as to hide me completely, and sent in her footman with the message. When the man had fairly entered the hall, she turned to me, and said—

"Now, Monsieur, fly! It is your only chance."

"I go, Madame; but before going, suffer me to assure you that I know neither your name, nor that of the person for whom you mistake me—that I have no idea of your place of residence—that I should not know you, if I saw you again to-morrow—in short, that you are to me as entirely a stranger as if this adventure had never happened."

"Monsieur, I thank you for the assurance; but I see the servant returning. Pray, begone!"

I sprang out without another word, and, never once looking back, darted down a neighbouring street, and waited in the shadow of a door-way till I thought the carriage must be out of sight.

The night was now fine, and the sky full of stars; but I saw nothing, heeded nothing, save my own turbulent and

perplexed thoughts. Absorbed in these, I mechanically followed the course of the Rue du Bac till I came to the Pont National. There, the sights of the eddying river; the long gleaming front of the Louvre; the quaint, glistening gables of the Tuileries; the far-reaching trees of the Champs Elysées, all silvered in the soft, uncertain moonlight, arrested my steps, and I stood, for a long time, leaning against the parapet. Then I heard the quarters chime from belfry to belfry all over the quiet city, and found that it was half-past three o'clock. Presently a patrol of *gendarmes* went by, and so, finding that they paused, and looked at me suspiciously, I crossed the bridge, and bent my steps homewards. By the time that I reached the Cite Bergère it was past four, and the early market-carts were already rumbling along the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre. I felt as if days and nights had gone by since I left home last, and, going up wearily to my apartments, found a note waiting for me in Oliphant's hand-writing. It ran thus:—

"MY DEAR DAMON,—Do you know that it is now a month since I last saw you? Do you know that I have called twice at your lodgings without finding you at home? I hear of you as having been constantly seen, of late, in the society of a very pretty woman of our mutual acquaintance; but I confess that I do not desire to see you go to the devil entirely without the friendly assistance of

Yours faithfully,

HAROLD OLIPHANT."

I read the note twice. I could scarcely believe that I had so neglected my only friend. Surely I had been mad, or a fool, or both! Too anxious and unhappy to sleep, and too utterly tired to sit up, I lit my lamp, threw myself upon the bed, and lay thinking over the last four weeks, till morning came with its sunshine and its traffic, and found me "a wiser," if not a "better man."

"Half-past seven!" said I, as I jumped up, and plunged my head into a basin of cold water. "Dr. Lucet shall see me before nine this morning. I'll call on Oliphant at lunch time; at three, I must get back for the afternoon lecture; and in the evening—in the evening,

by Jove, Madame de Launay must be content with her adorable Chapuis, for the deuce a bit of your humble servant will she ever see again !”

And away I went presently, along the sunny streets, humming to myself those saucy lines of good Sir Walter Raleigh’s :

“ Shall I like a hermit dwell,  
On a rock, or in a cell,  
Calling home the smallest part  
That is missing of my heart,  
To bestow it where I may,  
Meet a rival every day ?  
If she undervalue me,  
What care I how fair she be ?”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE WIDOW OF A MINISTER OF FINANCE.

"You are just in time, Leigh, to do me a service," said Oliphant, looking up from his desk as I went in, and reaching out his hand to me over a barricade of books and papers.

"Then I am very glad that I have come," I replied ; "but what confusion is this? Are you going anywhere?"

"Yes—to perdition. There, kick that rubbish out of your way, and sit down."

Never very orderly, Oliphant's rooms were, this time, in as terrible a condition of litter as may well be conceived. The table was a very pyramid of bills, old letters, books, cigars, gloves, card-cases, and pamphlets. The carpet was strewn with portmanteaus, hat-cases, travelling straps, old luggage labels, railway wrappers, and the like. The chairs and sofas were piled high with wearing apparel. As for Oliphant himself, he looked haggard and weary, as though the last four weeks had laid four years upon his shoulders.

"You look ill," I said, clearing a corner of the sofa for my own accommodation, "or *ennuye*, which is much the same thing. Tell me, what is in the wind, and what can I do for you?"

"The matter is that I am going abroad," said he, with his chin resting moodily in his two palms, and his elbows on the table.

"Going abroad!—where?"

"I don't know—

'Anywhere,—anywhere, out of the world!'

It's of very little consequence whether I betake myself to the East or to the West; eat rice in the tropics, or drink train-oil at the Pole."

"But have you no settled projects?"

"None whatever."

"And don't care what becomes of you?"

"Not in the least."

"Then, in heaven's name, what has happened?"

"The very thing that, three weeks ago, would have made me the happiest fellow in Christendom. What are you going to do to-morrow?"

"Nothing, beyond my ordinary routine of medical study."

"Humph! could you get an entire holiday, for once?"

I thought of how many I had taken of late, and blushed as I answered—

"Oh yes, easily."

"Well, then, I want you to spend the day with me. It will be, perhaps, my last in Paris, for many a month, or year. I—Pshaw! I may as well say it, and have done with it. I am going to be married."

"Married!" I echoed, starting up involuntarily, for it was the last thing I should have guessed.

Oliphant tugged away at his moustache with both hands, as was his habit when perplexed or troubled, and nodded gloomily.

„To whom?"

"To Madame d'Argenteuil."

"And are you not very happy?"

"Happy! I am the most miserable dog unchanged."

I was more at fault now than ever.

"I—judging from trifles which men would scarcely have observed," I said hesitatingly, "I—I thought you were interested in Madame d'Argenteuil."

"Interested!" cried he, pushing back his chair, and springing to his feet, as if the word stung him, "By heaven! I love that woman as I never loved in my life."

"Then why.—"

"I'll tell you why—or, at least, I will tell you as much as I may—as I can; for the affair is hers, and not mine.

She has a cousin (cûrse him !) to whom she was betrothed from childhood. His estates adjoined hers ; family interests were concerned in their union ; and the parents on both sides arranged matters. When, however, Monsieur d'Argenteuil fell in love with her—a man much older than herself, of immense wealth, and lofty position—her father did not hesitate to send the cousin to the devil, and marry his daughter to the Minister of Finance. The cousin, it seems, was then a wild, young fellow—not particularly in love with her himself—and not at all inconsolable for her loss. When, however, M. d'Argenteuil was good enough to die (which he had the bad taste to do very hastily, and without making by any means the splendid provision for his widow which he had promised) our friend the cousin comes forward again. By this time he is enough man of the world to appreciate the value of land—more especially as he has sold, mortgaged, and played the deuce with nearly every acre of his own. He pleads the old engagement, and, as he is pleased to call it, the old love. Madame d'Argenteuil is a young widow, alone, needing something for her heart to rest upon—in short, her sense of justice is touched, her old girlish interest re-awakened, and the result is that she not only accepts the cousin, but lends him large sums of money, suffers the title-deeds of her estates to go into the hands of his lawyer, and is formally betrothed to him before the eyes of all Paris ?”

“ Who is this man ?—where is he ?” I asked, eagerly.

“ He is an officer of Chasseurs, now serving with his regiment in Algiers—a daring, dashing, reckless fellow, heartless and dissipated enough, but a splendid soldier. However, to continue—having committed her property to his hands, and suffered her name to be associated publicly with his, Madame d'Argenteuil, during his absence in Algiers, has done me the honour to prefer me. I have the first real love of her life, and the short and long of it is, that we are to be privately married to-morrow.”

“ And why privately ?”

"Ah, there's the pity of it, Iago! There's the disappointment and the bitterness!"

"Can't Madame d'Argenteuil write and tell this man that she loves somebody else better?"

"Confound it, no! The fellow has her too much in his power, and, if he chose to be dishonest, could half ruin her. At all events, she is afraid of him, and I—I am as helpless as a child in the matter. If I were a rich man, I would snap my fingers at him; but how can I, with a paltry eight hundred a year, provide for that woman? Pshaw. If I could but settle it with pair of hair-triggers and twenty paces of turf, I'd leave little work for the lawyers!"

"Well, then, what is to be done?"

"Only this—" replied he, striding impatiently to and fro, like a caged lion. "I must just bear with my helplessness, and leave the remedy to those who can oppose skill to skill, and lawyer to lawyer."

"At all events, you marry the lady."

"Aye—I marry the lady; but I start to-morrow night for Berlin, *en route* for anywhere that chance may lead me!"

"Without her?" I exclaimed.

"Without her! Do you suppose that I would stay in Paris—I, her husband—and live apart from her? meet her, like an ordinary acquaintance? See others admiring her?—Be content to lounge in and out of her *soirées* or ride beside her carriage, now and then, as you, or fifty others might? Perhaps, have even to endure the presence of De Marly himself? No, thank you!—any number of miles, whether of land or sea, were better than a martyrdom like that!"

"Marly!" I repeated. "Where have I heard that name?"

"You may have heard of it in a hundred places," replied my friend. "As I said before, the man is a gallant soldier, and does gallant things. But to return to the present question—may I depend on you to-morrow? For

we must have a witness, and our witness must be both discreet and silent."

"On my silence and discretion you may rely absolutely."

"And you can be here by nine?"

"By daybreak, if you please."

"I won't tax you to that extent. Nine will do perfectly."

"Adieu, then, till that time."

"Adieu, and thank you."

With this I left him, somewhat relieved to find that I had escaped all cross-examination on the score of Madame de Launay; too unhappy to be amused by trifles, he had not once named her, or, perhaps, even remembered her existence!

"De Marly!" I again repeated to myself, as I took my rapid way towards the Hotel Dieu. "De Marly! why, surely, it must have been that evening at Madame d'Argenteuil's——"

And then I recollected that De Marly was the name of that officer who was said to have ridden by night, and single-handed, through the heart of the enemy's camp, somewhere in Algiers.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### A MARRIAGE NOT "A LA MODE."

THE marriage took place in a little out-of-the-way Protestant chapel beyond the barriers, at about a quarter before ten o'clock the next morning. Oliphant and I were there first, and Madame d'Argenteuil, having come part of the distance in a cab and part on foot, to avoid observation, arrived a few minutes later, accompanied by an elderly woman-servant. She looked paler than ever, almost nun-like, with her black veil tied closely under her chin, and a dark violet dress, which might have passed for mourning. She gave her hand to Oliphant, without speaking; then knelt down at the communion-table, with her face bent low, and so remained till we had all taken our places. As for Oliphant, he had even less colour than she, but held his head up haughtily, and betrayed no sign of the conflict within.

It was a melancholy little chapel, dusty, full of black and white funereal tablets, and as cold as a vault. We shivered as we stood about the altar; the clergyman's teeth chattered as he read the first prayers of the marriage service; and the echoes of our responses reverberated forlornly up among the gothic rafters overhead. Even the sunbeams struggled sadly and palely down the upper windows, and the chill autumnal wind whistled in when the door was opened, bringing with it a pattering shower of dry leaves. The ceremony over, the books signed in the vestry, and the clergyman, clerk, and pew-opener duly paid for their services, we prepared to be gone. For a couple of moments, Oliphant and his bride stood apart in the shadow of the porch. I saw him take the hand on which he had just placed the ring, and look down upon it

tenderly, wistfully—I saw him bend lower, and lower, whispering what no other ears might hear—I saw their lips meet for one brief instant—then the lady's veil was lowered; she turned hastily away; her servant followed; and before I had reached Oliphant's side, they were both already out of sight.

"By heaven," said he, grasping my hand as though he meant to crush it, and speaking in a low, deep tone, that quivered with suppressed feeling, "this is hard to bear!"

I but returned the pressure of his hand; for I knew not how to comfort him. Thus we lingered for some minutes in silence, till the clergyman, having put off his surplice, passed us with a bow, and went out, and the pew-opener, after pretending to polish the handle of the inner-door with her apron, and otherwise waiting about with an air of fidgetty politeness, dropped a civil courtesy, and begged permission to remind us that the chapel must now be closed.

Oliphant started, and shook himself like a water-dog, as if he would so shake off "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

"*Rex est qui metuit nihil!*" said he; "but I am a sovereign in bad circumstances, for all that. Heigho! Care killed a cat—What shall we do with ourselves, Leigh, for the rest of the day?"

"I hardly know. Would you like to go a few miles into the country?"

"Nothing better. I feel as if the air would do me good."

"What say you to St. Germain's? There is a forest there, and——"

"Excellent! We can do as we like, with nobody to stare at us; and I am in a horribly uncivilised frame of mind this morning."

With this, we turned once more towards Paris, and, jumping into the first cab that came by, were driven to the station, and took our places in the train then about to start.

There were no other passengers in the carriage, so Oliphant infringed the company's mandate by lighting a cigar, and I, finding him disinclined for talk, did the same thing, and watched the passing country. Flat and uninteresting at first, it consisted of a mere sandy plain, treeless, hedgeless, and imperfectly cultivated, in straggling strips of corn and vegetables. By and by came a line of stunted pollards, a hamlet, and a little dreary cemetery. Then the landscape improved ; the horizon became rounded into forms of sloping hills ; the Seine, studded with islets, wound through the meadow-land at our feet ; a lofty viaduct carried us from height to height across the eddying river ; and, last of all, came trees on either side, dressed in the gold and scarlet liveries of autumn, opening every now and then into long vistas, and yielding glimpses of

“—verdurous glooms, and winding mossy ways.”

Through this wood the line continued to run, till we reached our destination, and, alighting, found ourselves directly facing the old red and black chateau of St. Germain-en-Lays. Leaving this, and the little dull town behind us, we loitered for some time about the broad walks of the park, and then passed on into the forest. Although it was neither a Sunday nor a fête-day, there were pleasure parties gipseying under trees—Parisian cockneys riding raw-boned steeds—pony-chaises full of laughing grisettes, dashing up and down the broad roads that pierce the wood in various directions—old women selling cakes and lemonade—workmen gambling with half-pence on the smooth turf by the wayside—*bonnes*, comely and important, with their little charges playing round them, and their busy fingers plying the knitting needles as they walked—young ladies sketching trees, and prudent governesses reading novels close by ; in short, all the life and variety of a favourite suburban resort on an ordinarily fine day towards the close of autumn.

Leaving the frequented routes to the right, we turned, by unspoken consent, into one of the many hundred tracks

that diverged in every direction from the beaten roads, and, before long, had wandered deeper and deeper into the green shades and solitudes of the remoter part of the forest. Pausing, presently, to rest, Oliphant threw himself at full length on the mossy ground, with his hands clasping the back of his head, and his hat over his eyes : whilst I found a luxurious arm-chair in the gnarled roots of a lichen-tufted elm. Thus we remained for a considerable time puffing away at our cigars in that sociable silence which may almost claim to be an unique privilege of masculine friendship. Women cannot sit together for long without talking : men can enjoy each other's companionship for hours with scarcely the exchange of an idea. Who knows, however, if the "Indian weed" be not to some extent answerable here? Put a stop to the "care-charming" incense, and the fantastic smoke-wreath ; extinguish the friendly little fire that lurks at the foot of the column of white ash ; abolish the tribe of amber mouth-pieces, silver fusee-boxes, embroidered cigar-cases, and the like innocent and agreeable vanities, and I fear that our boasted reticence would not long endure the test. And what if it be so ? Need we demur if we are indebted to tobacco for one pleasure more ? Shade of Sir Walter Raleigh, forbid it !

A long time went by in this silent fellowship, during which I watched the squirrels up in the beech-trees, and the dancing of the green and russet leaves against the sky, and thought dreamily of home, of my father, of the far past, and the possible future. I asked myself how, when my term of study came to an end, I should ever again endure the old home-life at Normandene ? How settle down for life as my father's partner, conforming myself to his prejudices, obeying all the demands of his imperious temper, and accepting for evermore the monotonous routine of a provincial practice ? Finding no answer in my own heart to these questions, I sighed heavily, and the sigh roused Oliphant's attention.

"Why, Damon," said he, turning over on his elbow, and

pushing up his hat to the level of his eyes, "what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing—at least, nothing new."

"Well, new or old, what is it? A man must be either in debt, or in love, when he sighs in that way. You look as melancholy as a second Werter?"

"I—I ought not to be melancholy, I suppose; for I was thinking of home."

Oliphant's face and voice softened immediately.

"Poor boy!" said he, throwing away the end of his cigar, "yours is not a bright home, I fear. You have, I think, lost your mother?"

"From infancy."

"And have no sisters?"

"None. I was an only child."

"Your father, however, is living."

"Yes, my father lives. He is a rough-tempered, eccentric man; misanthropic, but clever, and an excellent parent in his own strange way. Still——"

"Still, what?"

—"I dread the life that lies before me! I dread the life without society, without ambition, without change—the dull house, the bounded sphere of action—the bondage of all but thought, which—Pshaw! what use is it to think of these things?—what need to trouble you with them?"

"This use, that it does you good to tell, and me to listen. Sympathy, like mercy, blesteth him that gives and him that takes, and if I cannot actually help you, I am, at all events, thankful to be taken out of myself. Go on—tell me more of your prospects. Have you no acquaintance at Normandene whose society will make the place pleasant to you? No boyish friends? No pretty cousins? No first-loves from amongst whom to choose a wife in time to come?"

I shook my head sadly.

"Did I not tell you that my father was a misanthrope?" I said. He visits no one, unless professionally. We have no friends, and no relations."

"Humph! that's awkward. However, it leaves you free to make your own friends, when you go back. A medical man need never be without a visiting connexion. His very profession puts a thousand opportunities in his way."

"That is true; but—"

"But what?"

"I am not fond of the profession. I have never liked it. I would give much to relinquish it altogether."

Olipphant gave utterance to a prolonged and very dismal whistle.

"This," said he gravely, "is the most serious part of the business. To live in a dull place is bad enough—to live with dull people is bad enough; but to have one's thoughts perpetually occupied with an uncongenial subject, and one's energies devoted to an uncongenial pursuit, is just misery, and nothing short of it! In fact, 'tis a moral injustice, and one that no man should be required to endure."

"Yet I must endure it."

"Why?"

"Because it is too late to do otherwise."

"It is never too late to repair an evil, or an error."

"Unless such reparation involved an error still more grave! No, Olipphant, I will not now begin to play the part of a disobedient son. Too much time and too much money have been given to the thing for that;—I must let it take its course. There's no help for it!"

Olipphant looked at me fixedly, and then fell back into his old position.

"Heigho!" said he, pulling the hat once more over his eyes, "I was a disobedient son. My father intended me for the Church—I was expelled from College for fighting a duel before I was twenty, and then, sooner than go home disgraced, enlisted as a private in a cavalry corps bound for foreign service. Luckily, they found me out before the ship sailed, and made the best of a bad bargain by purchasing me a cornetcy in a dragoon regiment. I would not advise you to be disobedient, Damon. My experience in that line has been bitter enough."

"How so? You escaped a profession for which you were disinclined, and entered one for which you had every qualification."

"Aye; but the cursed *esclandre*—first the duel, then the expulsion, then my disappearance for two months—My mother was in bad health at the time, too; and I, her favourite son, I—in short, the anxiety was too much for her. She—she died before I had been six weeks in the regiment. There, we won't talk of it. It's the one subject that—"

His voice faltered, and he broke off abruptly.

"I wish you were going with me to Berlin," said he, after a long silence which I had not attempted to interrupt.

"I wish I were," I replied, "with all my heart!"

"And yet," he added, "I am glad on—on her account, that you remain in Paris. You will visit her sometimes, Leigh?"

"If Madame d' Ar—I mean, if Mrs. Oliphant, will permit me."

An involuntary smile flitted across his lip—the first I had seen there all the day.

"She will be glad—grateful. She knows that I value you—she has proof that I trust you—and you are the only possessor of our secret."

"It is as safe with me," I said, "as if I were dead, and in my grave."

"I know it, Leigh. Well—you will see her sometimes; you will tell me how she is looking; if—if she be ill, you will not conceal it from me; and in case of any emergency—any annoyance arising from De Marly."

"Were she my own sister," I said, earnestly, "she could not find me readier to assist—defend her, if need be—to the utmost of my strength and skill. Of this, Oliphant, be assured."

"Thank you," he said, and stretched up his hand to me. "I do believe you are true—though there are few men, and still fewer women, of whom I should like to say as much. By the way, Leigh, beware of that little flirt, Madame de Launay. She has charming eyes, but no more heart than

a vampire. Besides, it will do you no good to be entangled by a married woman. You are too young to venture on such dangerous ground, and too inexperienced."

I smiled—perhaps somewhat bitterly—for the wound was still fresh, and I could not help wincing when any hand came near it.

"You are right," I replied. "Madame de Launay is a dangerous woman; but dangerous for me no longer. However, I have paid rather dearly for my safety."

And with this, I told him the whole story, from beginning to end, confessing all my follies without reservation. Surprised, amused, sometimes unable to repress a smile, and sometimes genuinely compassionate, he heard my narrative through, accompanying it from time to time with muttered comments and ejaculations, none of which were very flattering to Madame de Launay. Then, when I had done, he sprang to his feet, laid his hand heavily upon my shoulder, and said :—

"Damon, there are a great many disagreeable things in life which wise people say are good for us, and for which they tell us we ought to be grateful in proportion to our discomfort. For my own part, however, I am no optimist. I am not fond of mortifying the flesh, and the eloquence of Socrates would fail to persuade me that a carbuncle was a cheerful companion, or the gout an ailment to be ardently desired. Yet, for all this, I cannot say that I look upon your adventure in the light of a misfortune. You have lost time, spent money, and endured a considerable amount of aggravation; but you have, on the other hand, acquired ease of manner, facility of conversation, and just that necessary polish which fits a man for good society. Come! you have received a lesson both in morals and manners, which you are not likely soon to forget, so farewell to Madame de Launay, and let us write *Pour acquit* against the score!"

Willing enough to accept this cheerful view, I flourished an imaginary autograph upon the air with the end of my



cane, and, laughingly dismissed the subject, chatting upon indifferent topics, as people do who are about to part, and don't like to remember it. We then strolled back through the wood, treading the soft moss and fallen leaves under our feet; startling the brown lizards from our path, and the squirrels from the lower branches of the great trees; and, now and then, surprising a plump little green frog, who skipped away into the long grass, like an animated emerald. Emerging hence into the House-park, we paused for some time upon the terrace, admiring the superb panorama of undulating woodland and cultivated champagne, which, seen through the golden haze of an autumnal afternoon, lay spread in glory before us, unto the remotest horizon. To our right stood the prison-like chateau, flinging back the sunset from its innumerable casements in burning "patines of bright gold," and seeming to drink in the warm glow at every pore of its old, red bricks. To our left, all lighted up against the sky, rose the lofty tree-tops of the forest which we had just quitted. Our shadows stretched behind us across the level terrace, like the shadows of giants. Involuntarily, we dropped our voices. It would have seemed almost like a profanity to speak aloud while the first influence of that scene was upon us.

Passing presently towards the verge of the terrace, we became aware of an artist who, with his camp stool under his arm, and his portfolio at his feet, was, like ourselves, taking a last look at the sunset before going away. As we approached, he looked up, and recognised us. It was Herr Franz Müller, the story-telling student of the Fraternity of *L'æ Chicards*.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," said he, courteously lifting his red cap, and letting it fall back again, a little on one side; "we shall not enjoy many more such sights this year!"

"Indeed, no," replied Oliphant. "One high wind would leave the trees nearly bare, and one day's rain would wash away all the fading colours of these flower-beds. Have you been sketching in the forest?"

"No—I have been making a study of the chateau and terrace from this point, with the landscape beyond—it is for an historical subject on which I am going to work during the winter."

And, with this, he good-naturedly opened his folio, and took out the sketch, which was a tolerably large one, and represented the scene under much the same conditions of light as we now saw it.

"I shall have a group of figures here," said the student, pointing to a spot on the terrace, "and a more distant one there; with a sprinkling of dogs, and, perhaps, a head or two at an open window of the chateau. I shall also add a flag flying on the turret, yonder."

"A scene, I suppose, from the life of Louis the Thirteenth," I suggested.

"No—I mean it for the exile Court of James the Second," replied he, "introducing the King, and Mary of Modena, and the Prince their son, who was afterwards the Pretender."

"It is a good subject," said Oliphant. "You will find excellent portraits of all these people at Versailles, no doubt; and a lively description of their Court, mode of life, and so forth, if my memory serves me correctly, in the tales of Anthony, Count Hamilton. But with all this, I dare say, you are better acquainted than I."

"*Parbleu !* not I!" said the student, shouldering his camp-stool, as if it were a musket, and slinging his portfolio by a strap across his back; "therefore, I am all the more obliged to you for the information. I should never have heard of the book, if you had not mentioned it. My reading is neither very extensive, nor very useful; and as for my library, I could pack it all into a hat-case any day, and find room for a few other trifles at the same time. Here is the author I chiefly study; he is my constant companion, and, like myself, looks somewhat the worse for wear."

Saying which, he produced from one of his pockets a

little, greasy, dog-eared volume of Beranger, about the size of a small snuff-box, and began singing aloud, to a very cheerful air, a song, of which a certain faithless Mademoiselle Lisette was the heroine, and of which the refrain was always:—

*Lisette ! ma Lisette.  
Tu m'as trompé toujours ;  
Je veux, Lisette,  
Boire à nos amours."*

To this accompaniment we walked back through the gardens to the railway station, where, being ten minutes too soon, our companion amused himself by "chaffing," questioning, contradicting, and otherwise ingeniously tormenting the check-takers and porters of the establishment. One pompous official, in particular, became so helplessly indignant that he retired into a little office overlooking the platform, and was heard to swear fluently for several minutes. The time having expired, and the doors being opened, we passed out with the rest of the home-going Parisians, and were about to take our places, when Müller, climbing like a cat to the roof-seats on the top of the second-class carriages, beckoned to us to follow.

"Who would be shut up with ten fat people and a baby, when fresh air can be breathed, and tobacco smoked, for the same number of francs?" asked he. "You don't mean to say that you came down to St. Germain in one of the dens below?"

"Yes, we did," I replied; "but we had it to ourselves."

"So much the worse. Man is a gregarious animal, and woman also—which proves Zimmerman to have been neither, and accounts for the brotherhood of *Les Chicards*. Would you like to see how that old gentleman looks when he is angry?"

"Which? The one in the opposite corner?"

"The same."

"Well, that depends on circumstances. Why do you ask?"

"Because I'll engage to satisfy your curiosity in less than ten minutes."

"Oh, no, don't affront him," said I, nervously. "We shall only have a scene."

"I won't affront him. I promise not to utter a syllable, either offensive or defensive."

"Leave him alone, then, poor devil!"

"Nonsense! If he chooses to be annoyed, that's his business, and not mine. Now, you'll see."

And Müller, alert for mischief, stared fixedly at the old gentleman in the opposite corner for some minutes—then sighed—roused himself as if from a profound reverie—seized his portfolio—took out a pencil and a sheet of paper, mended the pencil with an elaborate show of fastidiousness and deliberation—stared again—drew a deep breath—turned somewhat aside, as if anxious to conceal his object, and began sketching rapidly. Now and then he paused; stole a furtive glance over his shoulder; bit his lip, rubbed out, corrected, glanced again, and then went on rapidly as before.

In the meanwhile the old gentleman, who was somewhat red and irascible, began to get seriously uncomfortable. He frowned, fidgetted, coughed, buttoned and unbuttoned his coat, and jealously watched every proceeding of his tormenter. A general smile dawned upon the faces of the rest of the travellers. The priest over the way pinched his lips together, and looked down demurely. The two girls, next to the priest, tittered behind their handkerchiefs. The young man with the blue cravat sucked the top of his cane, and winked openly at his companions, both of whom were cracking nuts, and flinging the shells down the embankment. Presently Müller threw his head back; held the drawing off, still studiously keeping the back of it towards the rest of the passengers; looked at it with half-closed eyes; stole another exceedingly cautious glance at his victim; and then, affecting for the first time to find himself observed, made a vast show

of pretending to sketch the country through which we were passing.

The old gentleman could stand it no longer.

"Monsieur," said he, angrily, "Monsieur, I will thank you not to take my portrait. I object to it, Monsieur."

"Charming distance," said Müller, addressing himself to me. "Wants interest, however, in the foreground. That's a picturesque tree yonder, is it not?"

The old gentleman struck his umbrella sharply on the floor.

"It's of no use, Monsieur," he exclaimed, getting more red, and excited. "You are taking my portrait, and I object to it. I know you are taking my portrait."

Müller looked up, dreamily.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur," said he. "Did you speak?"

"Yes, Monsieur. I did speak. I repeat that you shall not take my portrait."

"Your portrait, Monsieur?"

"Yes, my portrait!"

"But, Monsieur," remonstrated the artist, with an air of mingled candour and surprise, "I never dreamed of taking your portrait!"

"*Sacre nom!*" shouted the old gentleman, with another rap of the umbrella, "I saw you do it! Everybody saw you do it!"

"Nay, if Monsieur will but do me the honor to believe that I was simply sketching from nature, as the train..."

"An impudent subterfuge, Sir!" interrupted the old gentleman. "An impudent subterfuge, and nothing else!"

Müller, drew himself up with immense dignity.

"Monsieur," he said, haughtily, "that is an expression which I must request you to retract. I have already assured you, on the word of a gentleman——"

"A gentleman, indeed! A pretty gentleman! He takes my portrait, and——"

"I did not take your portrait, Monsieur."

"Good heavens!" cried the old gentlemen, looking round "was ever such assurance? Did not every one present see him in the act? I appeal to every one—to you Monsieur, to you Mesdames,—to you, reverend father—did you not all see this person taking my portrait?"

"Nay, then, if it must come to this," said Müller, "let the sketch be evidence, and let these ladies and gentlemen decide whether it is really the portrait of Monsieur—and if they think it like?"

Saying which, he turned the paper, and displayed a head, sketched, it is true, with admirable spirit and cleverness; but—the head of an ass, with a thistle in its mouth!

A simultaneous explosion of mirth followed. Even the priest laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, and Oliphant, notwithstanding his preoccupation of mind and heaviness of heart, was surprised into a genuine shout. As for the old gentleman, the victim of this elaborate practical joke, he glared at us all round, worse that it was a premeditated insult from beginning to end, and swelling with suppressed rage, flung himself back into his corner, and looked resolutely in the opposite direction.

By this time we were within a mile or two of Paris, and the student, satisfied with his success, packed up his portfolio, brought out a great meerschaum with a snakey tube, and smoked like the chimney of a manufactory for the rest of the way.

When we alighted, it was nearly five o'clock.

"What shall we do next?" said Oliphant, pulling drearily at his moustache. "I am so devilish dull to-day that I am ashamed to ask anybody to do me the charity to dine with me—especially a *bon garçon* like Herr Müller."

"Don't be ashamed," said the student, laughingly. "I would dine with Pluto himself, if the dishes were good, and my appetite as sharp as to-day."

"*Allons* then! Where shall we go; to the *Trois Frères*, or the *Moulin Rouge*, or the *Maison Dorée*?"

"The *Trois Frères*," said Müller, with the air of one

who deliberates on the fate of nations ; " has the disadvantage of being situated in the Palais Royal, where the band still continues to play a half-past five every afternoon. Now, music should come on with the sweets and the champagne. It is not appropriate with soup or fish, and it distracts one's attention if injudiciously administered with the made dishes."

" True. Then shall we try the *Moulin Rouge* ?"

Müller shook his head.

" At the *Moulin Rouge*," said he, gravely, " one can breakfast well ; but their dinners are stereotyped. For the last ten years, they have not added a new dish to their *carte* ; and the discovery of a new dish, says Brillat Savarin, is of more importance to the human race than the discovery of a new planet. No—I should not vote for the *Moulin Rouge*."

" Well, then, Véfours, Véry's, the Café Anglais—"

" Véfour's is traditional ; the Café Anglais infested with English, and at Véry's, which is otherwise a meritorious establishment, one's digestion is disturbed by the sight of omniverous provincials, who drink champagne with the *roti*, and eat melon at dessert."

Oliphant laughed outright.

" At this rate," said he, " we shall get no dinner at all ! What is to become of us ? Where are we to go if neither Véry's nor the *Trois Frères*, nor the *Moulin Rouge*, nor the *Maison Dorée*——"

" Hold there ! " interrupted the student theatrically ; " for, by my halidome, sirs, I said not a syllable in disparagement of the house, yclept Dorée ? Is it not there that we eat of the crab of Bordeaux succulent and roseate ? Is it not there that we drink of Veuve Cliquot the costly, and of Johannisberger, to which all other hocks are vinegar and water ? Never let it be said that Franz Müller, being of sound mind and body, did less than justice to the reputation of the *Maison Dorée* ! "

" To the *Maison Dorée*, then," said Oliphant, " with

what speed and appetite we may! By Jove, Herr Franz, you are a *connoisseur* in the matter of dining."

"A man who for twenty-nine days out of every thirty, pays his sixty-five centimes for two dishes at a student's Restaurant in the Quartier Latin, knows better than most people where to go for a good dinner when he has the chance," said Müller, philosophically. "The ragoûts of the Temple—the *râlequins* of the *Cité*—the fried fish of the Odeon arcades—the unknown hashes of the *guingettes*, and the 'funeral baked meats of the Palais Royal, are all familiar to my pocket and my palate. I do not scruple to confess that I have in cases of desperate emergency, even availed myself of the advantages of *L'hazard*."

"*L'hazard*," said I, "what is that?"

"*L'hazard de la fourchette*!" replied the student, "is the resort of the vagabond, the *gamin*, and the *chiffonier*. It lies down by the river-side, near the Halles, and consists of nothing but a shed, a fire, and a caldron. In this caldron a seething sea of oleaginous liquid conceals an infinite variety of animal and vegetable substances. The arrangements of the establishment are beautifully simple. The votary pays his five centimes, and is armed by the presiding proprietor with a huge two-pronged iron fork. This fork he plunges in once:—he may get a calf's foot, or a potatoe, or a sheep's head, or a carrot, or a cabbage, or nothing, as fate and the fork direct. All men are gamblers in some way or another, and *L'hazard* is a game of gastronomic chance. But from the ridiculous to the sublime, it is but a step—and while talking of *L'hazard*, behold, we have arrived at the *Maison Dorée*!"



## CHAPTER XX.

### A DINNER AT THE MAISON DOREE, AND AN EVENING PARTY IN THE QUARTIER LATIN.

THE most genial of companions was our new acquaintance, Franz Müller, the art student. Light-hearted, buoyant, and unassuming, he gave his animal spirits full play, and, almost without knowing it, was the life of our little dinner. He had more natural gaiety than generally belongs to the German character, and his good-temper was inexhaustible. He enjoyed everything; he made the best of everything; he saw food for laughter in everything. He was always amused, and, therefore, always amusing. Even if he were not at all times original, there was a spontaneity in his mirth which acted upon others as a perpetual stimulant. Altogether, he was what the French call a *bon garçon*, and the English a capital fellow; easy without assurance, comic without vulgarity; and, as Sydney Smith wittily hath it—"a great number of other things without a great number of other things." Upon Oliphant, who had been all day silent, abstracted, and unlike his usual self, this joyous influence acted like a tonic. As entertainer, he was bound to exert himself, and the exertion did him good. He threw off his melancholy; and, with the help, possibly, of somewhat more than his usual quantity of wine, entered thoroughly into the passing joyousness of the hour. What a *recherche*, luxurious, extravagant little dinner it was, that evening at the Maison Doree! We had a charming cabinet overlooking the Boulevard, furnished with as much looking-glass, crimson velvet, gilding, and arabesque painting as could be got together within the space of twelve feet by eight. Our wine came to table in a silver cooler that Cellini might have wrought. Our meats were

served upon porcelain that would have driven Palissy to despair. We had nothing that was in season, except game; and everything that was out; which appears to be the modern criterion of excellence with respect to a dinner. Above all, we were waited upon by the most imposing of waiters—a waiter whose imperturbable gravity was not to be shaken by any amount of provocation, and whose neckcloth alone was sufficient to qualify him for the church.

How merry we were! How Müller tormented that diplomatic waiter! What stories we told! what puns we made! What brilliant things we said, or fancied we said; over our Chambertin and Johannisberger! Müller knew nothing of the substratum of sadness underlying all that jollity. He little thought how heavy Oliphant's strong heart had been that morning. He had no idea that my friend and I were to part on the morrow, for months, or years, as the case might be—he to carry his unrest hither and thither through distant lands, and I to remain alone in a strange city, pursuing studies to which my natural tastes were opposed, and toiling onward to a future without fascination or hope. But, as the glass seals tell us, "such is life." We are all mysteries to one another. The pleasant fellow whom we invite to dinner, because he amuses us, carries a scar on his soul which it would frighten us to see. My friend Johnson, when he praises, my claret, little dreams of the carking care that poisons it upon my palate; and robs it of all its aroma. Perhaps even the laughter-loving painter himself had his own little tragedy locked up in some secret corner of the heart that seemed to beat so lightly under that braided blouse of Palais Royale cut, and Quartier Latin fashion! Who could tell? and of what use would it be, if it were told? Smiles carry one through the world more agreeably than tears, and if the skeleton be kept decently out of sight in its own unsuspected closet, so much the better for you, and me, and society at large.

Dinner over, and the serious waiter dismissed with the dessert and the empty bottles, we sat by the open window

for a long time, sipping our coffee, smoking our cigars, and watching the busy life of the Boulevard below. There the shops were all alight, and the passers-by more numerous than by day. Carriages were dashing along, full of opera-goers and ball-room beauties. On the pavement, just under our window, were seated idlers who did not yet find it too cold for their *al fresco* absinthe and *grog-au-vin*. In the very next room, divided from us by only a slender partition, was a noisy party of young men and girls. We could hear their bursts of merriment, the chinking of their glasses as they pledged one another, the popping of the champagne corks, and almost the very jests that passed from lip to lip. Presently a band came and played at the corner of an adjoining street. All was mirth, all was life, all was amusement and dissipation, both in-doors and out-of-doors, in the "care-charming" city of Paris, on that pleasant October night; and we, of course, were gay and noisy, like our neighbours. Oliphant and Müller could scarcely be called new acquaintances. They had met some few times at the *Chicards*, and also, some years before, in Rome. What stories they told of artists whom they had known! what fun they made of Academic dons, and grave professors in high authority! what pictures they drew, of life in Rome—in Vienna—in Paris! Though we had no ladies of our party, and were only three in number, I am not sure that the merry-makers in the next room laughed any louder or oftener, than we!

At length the clock on the mantelpiece warned us that it was already half-past nine, and that we had been four hours at dinner. It was clearly time to vary the evening's amusement in some way or other, and the only question was what next to do? Should we go to a billiard-room? Or to the Salle Valentinoise? Or to some of the cheap theatres on the Boulevard du Temple? Or to the Tableaux Vivants? Or the Café des Aveugles? Or take a drive round the Boulevards in an open fly?

At length Müller remembered that some fellow-students

were giving a party that evening, and offered to introduce us.

"It is up five pairs of stairs, in the Quartier Latin," said he; "but thoroughly jolly—all students and grisettes. They'll be delighted to see us."

This admirable proposition was no sooner made than acted upon; so we started immediately, and Oliphant, who seemed to be well acquainted with the usages of student-life, proposed that we should take a store of sweetmeats with us for the ladies.

"There subsists," observed he, "a mysterious electric affinity between the grisette and the chocolate bon-bon. He who can skilfully exhibit the latter, is almost certain to win the heart of the former. Where the chocolat fails, however, the *marron glace* is an infallible specific. I recommend that we lay in a liberal supply of both weapons."

"Carried by acclamation," said Müller. "We can buy them on our way, in the Rue Vivienne. A capital shop; but one that I never patronise—they give no credit."

Chatting thus, and laughing, we made our way across the Boulevard, and through a net-work of by-streets into the Rue Vivienne, where we laid siege to a great *bon-bon* shop—a gigantic dépôt for dyspepsia at so much per kilogramme—and there filled our pockets with sweets of every imaginable flavour and colour. This done, a cab conveyed us in something less than ten minutes, across the river, to the Quartier Latin.

Müller's friends were three in number, and all students one of art, one of law, and one of medicine. They lodged at the top of a dingy house near the Café Procope, and being very great friends and very near neighbours, were giving this entertainment in partnership. Their names were Gustave, Jules, and Adrien. Adrien was the artist, and lived in the garret, just over the heads of Gustave and Jules, which made it very convenient for a party, and placed a *suite* of rooms at the disposal of their visitors.

Long before we had achieved the five pairs of stairs, we

heard the sound of voices, and the scraping of a violin, and on the fifth landing were received by a pretty young lady in a coquettish little cap, whom Müller familiarly addressed as Annette, and who piloted us into a very small bed-room, which was already full of hats and coats, bonnets, shawls, and umbrellas. Having added our own paletôts and beavers to the general stock, and having each received a little bit of pasteboard in exchange for the same, we were shown into the ball-room by Mademoiselle Annette, who appeared to fill the position of hostess, usher, and general superintendent. It was a good-sized room, somewhat low in the ceiling, and lighted up quite brilliantly with lots of tallow candles in bottles. All the furniture had been cleared out for the dancers, except a row of rout seats round the walls, and a chest of drawers, which was left in a recess between the windows for the convenience of the orchestra; the said orchestra consisting of a violin and accordion, both played by amateurs, with an occasional *obligato* on the common comb. As for the guests, they were, as Müller had already told us, all students and grisettes—the former wearing every strange variety of beard and blouse; the latter in pretty light-coloured muslins, and bewitching little caps, with the exception of two who had flowers in their hair, and belonged to the opera ballet. They were in the midst of a tremendous galop when we arrived, so we stood at the door, and looked on, and Oliphant flirted with Mademoiselle Annette. As soon as the galop was over, two of our hosts came forward to welcome us.

“The Duke of Oliphant and the Marquis of Stanton Leigh—Messieurs Jules Barbeau and Gustave Roquet,” said Müller with the most *degagé* air in the world.

Monsieur Jules, who was a tall young man with an enormous false nose of the regular carnival pattern, and Monsieur Gustave, who was short and stout, with a visible high-water mark round his throat and wrists, and curious leather mosaics in his boots, received us very cordially, and did not appear to be in the least surprised at the magnificence of

the introduction. On the contrary, they shook hands with us, apologised for the absence of Adrien, who was preparing the supper up-stairs; and offered to find us partners for the next polka. Oliphant immediately proposed for the hand of Mademoiselle Annette. Müller, declining adventurous aid, wandered among the ladies, making himself universally agreeable, and trusting for a partner to his own unassisted efforts. As for myself, I was indebted to Monsieur Gustave for my introduction to a very charming young lady whose name was Celestine, and with whom I fell over head and ears in love without a moment's warning. She was somewhat under the middle height, slender, supple, rosy-lipped, and coquettish to distraction. Her pretty mouth dimpled round with smiles at every word it uttered. Her very eyes laughed. Her hair, which was more adorned than concealed by a tiny muslin cap that held on by some unseen agency to the back of her head, was of a soft, warm, wavy brown, with a woof of gold threading it here and there. Her voice was, perhaps, a little loud; her conversation rather childish; her accent such as would scarcely have passed current in the Faubourg St. Germain; but what of that? One would be worse than foolish to expect style and cultivation in a grisette, and had I not had enough to disgust me with both, in Madame de Launay? After all, could anything be more charming than youth, beauty, and light-heartedness? Was Levizac of any importance to a mouth that could not speak without such a smile as Hebe might have envied? I was, at all events, in no mood to take exception to these little defects. I believe that I even looked upon them in the light of additional attractions. That which in another I should have called *bêtes* I set down to the score of *naïveté* in Mademoiselle Celestine.

Even her cockney Parisian had a certain charm for me. One is not difficult at twenty—by the way, I was now twenty-one—especially after dining at the Maison Doree.

Mademoiselle Celestine was frankness itself. Before I

had enjoyed the pleasure of her acquaintance for ten minutes, she had told me that she was an artificial florist; that her *patronne* lived in the Rue Menilmontant; that she went to her work every morning at nine, and left it every evening at eight; that she lodged *sous les toits* at No 70, Rue Aubry-le-Boucher; that her relations lived at Juoisy; and that she went to see them now and then on Sundays, when the weather and her funds permitted.

"And is the country pretty at Juoisy, Mademoiselle?" I asked, by way of keeping up the conversation.

"Oh, M'sieur, it is a real Paradise; there are trees, and fields, and there is the Seine close by, and a chateau, and a park, and a church on a hill—ah bah! there is nothing in Paris half so pretty; not even the Jardin des Plantes!"

"Is it long since you have been there?"

"Eight weeks, at the very least, M'sieur. But then it costs three francs and a half for the return ticket, and since I quarrelled with Emile.——"

"Emile!" said I, quickly. "Who is he?"

"He is a picture-frame maker, M'sieur, and works for a great dealer in the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre. He was my sweet-heart, and took me out somewhere every Sunday, till we quarrelled."

"And what did you quarrel about, Mademoiselle?"

My pretty partner laughed and tossed her head.

"Eh, *Mon Dieu!* M'sieur, he was jealous."

"Jealous of whom?"

"Of a gentleman—an artist—who wanted to paint me in one of his pictures. Emile did not like me to go to his *atelier* so often—and—and the gentleman gave me a shawl (such a pretty shawl!) and took me one evening to the theatre; and ——"

"And so Emile objected?"

"Yes, M'sieur."

"How very unreasonable!"

"That's just what I said, M'sieur."

"And have you never seen him since?"

"Oh, yes—he keeps company now with my cousin Cecile, and she humours him in everything."

"And the artist—what of him, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, I sat to him every evening, till his picture was finished. He was very *gentil*. He took me to the theatre several times, and once to dine with him at the *Moulin Rouge*; but that was after Emile and I had broken it off."

"Did you find it tiresome, sitting as a model?"

"*Mais, comme ça, et comme ça!* It was a beautiful dress, and became me wonderfully. To be sure, it was rather cold!"

"May I ask what character you were supposed to represent, Mademoiselle?"

"He said it was Phryne. I have no idea who she was; but I think she must have found it very uncomfortable if she always wore sandals, and went without stockings."

I looked down at her little foot, and thought how pretty it must have looked in the Greek sandal. I pictured her to myself in the graceful Greek robe, with a chalice in her hand, and her temples crowned with flowers. What a delicious Phryne! And what a happy fellow Praxiteles must have been!

"It was a privilege, Mademoiselle, to be allowed to see you in so charming a costume," I said, pressing her hand tenderly. "I confess that I envy that artist from the bottom of my heart."

Mademoiselle Celestine smiled, and returned the pressure.

"One might borrow it," said she, "for the Bal de l'Opera."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, if I dared only aspire to the honour of conducting you!"

"*Dame!* it is nearly four months to come!"

True but in the meantime, Mademoiselle——"

"In the meantime," said the fair Celestine, anticipating my hopes with all the unembarrassed straightforwardness imaginable, "I shall be delighted to improve M'sieur's acquaintance."



“Mademoiselle, you make me happy!”

“Besides M’sieur is an Englishman, and I like the English so much!”

“I am delighted to hear it, Mademoiselle. I hope I shall never give you cause to alter your opinion.”

“Last galop before supper!” shouted Monsieur Jules, through a brass speaking-trumpet, in order to make use of which he was obliged to hold up his nose with one hand. “Gentlemen, choose your partners. All persons to dance till they drop!”

There were a dozen couples up immediately, amongst whom Oliphant and Mademoiselle Annette, and Müller with one of the ballet ladies, were the first to start. As for Mademoiselle Celestine, she proved to be a damsel of forty-galop power. She never wanted to rest, and she never cared to leave off. She never even looked warm when it was over. I wonder to this day how it was that I did not die on the spot.

When the galop was over, we all went upstairs to Monsieur Adrien’s garret, where Monsieur Adrien, who had red hair, and wore glasses, received us in person, and made us welcome. Here we found the supper elegantly laid out on two doors, which had been taken off their hinges for the purpose, and were supported from beneath on divers boxes and casks of unequal heights, which caused the tables to slope, and the jellies to look like leaning towers of Pisa, and the sponge-cake (which was already professedly tipsy) to assume an air so unbecomingly convivial that it might almost have been called drunk.

Nobody thought of sitting down, and, if they had, there were no means of doing so; for Monsieur Adrien’s garret was none of the largest, and as we sometimes see in a small villa residence the whole house sacrificed for the honour of a winding staircase, so, in this instance, had the whole room been sacrificed to the splendour of the supper. For the inconvenience of standing, we were com-

pensated, however, by the abundance and excellence of the fare. There were cold fowls, meat pies, dishes of sliced ham, and pyramids of little Bologna sausages, with huge rolls of bread a yard in length, and lobster salad, and cold punch in abundance. In the manufacture of the two latter, however, Monsieur Adrien had made an unlucky mistake, having put brandy in the lobster-salad and mixed the punch with fine brown vinegar. Still, as the guests were all very hungry, it made but little difference. To the grisette, and the student, as to the school-boy, everything eatable is delicious. Their appetites are inexhaustible; their tastes primitive; their digestions faultless. Happy race! Is it not a pity that one cannot be gifted with a perennial youth, and belong to thee for ever?

The flirtations at supper were tremendous. In a bachelor establishment one cannot expect to find every convenience, and on this occasion the prevailing deficiency was among the plates and glasses; so those who had been partners in the dance now became partners in other matters, eating off the same plate, and drinking out of the same tumbler, which only made it so much the merrier. By and by, somebody volunteered a song, and somebody else made a speech, and then we went down again to the ball-room, and dancing recommenced.

The laughter now became louder, and the legs of the guests more vigorous than ever. The orchestra, too, received an addition to its strength in the person of a gentleman, who having drunk more *vin-ordinaire*, and eaten more of the brandied salad than was quite consistent with the preservation of his equilibrium, was still sober enough to oblige us with a spirited accompaniment on the shovel and tongs, which, with the violin and accordion, and the comb *obligato* before mentioned, produced quite a startling effect, and reminded one of Turkish marches, Pantomime overtures, and the like barbaric music.

In the midst of the first polka, however, we were interrupted by a succession of furious double knocks on

the floor beneath our feet. We stopped by involuntary consent—dancers, musicians, and all.

"It's our neighbour on the storey below," said Monsieur Jules. "He objects to the dancing."

"Then we'll dance a little heavier, to teach him better taste," said a student, who had so little hair on his head, and so much on his chin, that he looked as if his face had been turned upside down. "What is the name of the ridiculous monster?"

"Monsieur Tapinet."

"Ladies and gentlemen, let us dance for the edification of Monsieur Tapinet! Orchestra, strike up, in honour of Monsieur Tapinet! One, two, three, and away!"

Hereupon we uttered a general hurrah, and dashed off again, like a herd of young elephants. The knocking ceased, and we thought that Monsieur Tapinet had resigned himself to his fate, when, just as the Polka ended, and the dancers were promenading noisily round and round the room, the battery began afresh, and this time against the very door of the ball-room.

"*Par exemple!*" cried Monsieur Jules, "the enemy dares to attack us in our own lines!"

"Let him knock, and draw the bolt!" suggested one.

"Open it suddenly, and deluge him with water!" cried another.

"Tar and feather him!" proposed a third.

In the meantime, Monsieur Tapinet, happily ignorant of these agreeable schemes for his reception, continued to thunder away upon the outer panels, accompanying the raps with occasional loud coughs, and hems, and stampings of the feet.

"Hush! do nothing violent," cried Müller, scenting a practical joke with all the delight of a true sportsman. "Let us invite him in, and make fun of him. It will be ever so much more amusing!"

And, with this, he drove the rest somewhat back, and threw open the door, upon the outer threshold of which

with a stick in one hand, and a bedroom candle in the other, and a flowered dressing-gown tied round his ample waist by a cord and tassels, stood Monsieur Tapinet.

Müller received him with a profound bow, and said—

“Monsieur Tapinet, I believe?”

Monsieur Tapinet, who was very bald, very cross, and very stout, cast an irritable glance into the room, but, seeing so many people drew back, and said—

“Yes, that is my name, Monsieur; I lodge on the fourth floor—”

“But pray walk in, Monsieur Tapinet,” said Müller, opening the door still wider, and bowing more profoundly than before.

“Monsieur,” returned the fourth-floor lodger, “I—I only come to complain—”

“Whatever the occasion of this honour, Monsieur,” pursued the student, with increasing politeness, “we cannot suffer you to remain on the landing. Pray do us the favour to walk in.”

“Oh, walk in, pray walk in, Monsieur Tapinet,” echoed Jules, Gustave, and Adrien, all together.

The fourth-floor lodger hesitated; took a step forward, thought, perhaps, that, since we were all so polite, he would do his best to conciliate us; and, glancing down nervously at his dressing-gown and slippers, said—

“Really, gentlemen, I should have much pleasure, but I am not prepared”—

“Don’t mention it, Monsieur Tapinet,” said Müller. “We are delighted to receive you. Allow me to disembarass you of your candle.”

“And permit me,” said Jules, “to relieve you of your stick.”

“Pray, Monsieur Tapinet, do you never dance the polka?” asked Gustave.

“Bring Monsieur Tapinet a glass of cold punch,” said Adrien.

“And a plate of lobster salad,” added the bearded student.

Monsieur Tapinet, finding the door already closed behind him, looked round nervously, but encountering only polite and smiling faces, endeavoured to seem at his ease, and put the best face upon the matter.

"Indeed, gentlemen, you must excuse me," said he. "I never drink at night, and I never eat suppers. I only came to request.—"

"Nay, Monsieur Tapinet, we cannot suffer you to leave us without taking a glass of cold punch," pursued Müller.

"Upon my word," began the lodger, "I dare not—"

"A glass of white wine, then?"

"Or a cup of coffee?"

"Or some home-made lemonade?"

Monsieur Tapinet cast a look of helpless longing towards the door.

"If you really insist, gentlemen," said he, "I will take a cup of coffee; but indeed—"

"A cup of coffee for Monsieur Tapinet!" shouted Müller.

"A large cup of coffee for Monsieur Tapinet!" repeated Jules.

"A strong cup of coffee for Monsieur Tapinet!" cried Gustave, following up the lead of the other two.

The fourth-floor lodger frowned and coloured up, beginning to be suspicious of mischief, which Müller perceived immediately.

"You must pardon us, Monsieur Tapinet," he said, with the most winning amiability, "if we are all in unusually high spirits to-night. You are not aware, perhaps, that our friend Monsieur Jules Barbeau was married this morning, and that we are here in celebration of that happy event. Allow me to introduce you to the bride."

And, turning to one of the ballet ladies, who happened to be nearest, he led her forward with exceeding gravity, and presented her to Monsieur Tapinet as Madame Barbeau.

The fourth-floor lodger bowed, and went through the usual congratulations. In the meantime, some of the

others had prepared a mock sofa with a shawl and two chairs, one of which was occupied by a certain young lady named Louise, and the other by Celestine. As soon as it was ready, Müller, who had been only waiting for it, affected to remember for the first time that Monsiuer Tapinet was still standing.

"*Mon Dieu !*" he exclaimed, "has no one offered our visitor a chair? Monsieur Tapinet, I beg a thousand pardons. Pray do us the favour to be seated. Your coffee will be here immediately, and these ladies on the sofa will be delighted to make room !"

"Ah, yes, pray be seated, Monsieur Tapinet," cried the two girls. "We shall be charmed to make room for Monsieur Tapinet !"

More than ever confused and uncomfortable, poor Monsieur Tapinet bowed, saw no escape, sat down, and went through immediately, presenting the soles of his slippers to the company in the least picturesque manner imaginable. This involuntary performance was greeted with a shout of wild delight, and a universal burst of applause.

"For shame, Monsieur Tapinet—you've been drinking already !" said Müller.

"For shame, Monsieur Tapinet !" cried all the rest, in chorus.

The fourth-floor lodger sprang to his feet, scarlet with rage, and made a rush to the door ; but was hemmed in immediately. In vain he stormed ; in vain he swore. We joined hands, we called for music, we danced round him, we sang, and at last, having fairly bumped and thumped, and hustled him till we were tired, pushed him out on the landing, and left him to his fate.

After this interlude, the mirth grew fast and furious. Polka succeeded polka, and galop followed galop, till the orchestra declared they could play no longer, and the gentleman with the shovel and tongs collapsed in a corner of the room, and went to sleep with his head in the coal-scuttle. Then the ballet-ladies were prevailed upon to

favour us with a *pas de deux*, after which Müller sang a comic song with a chorus, in which everybody joined; and then the orchestra was bribed with hot brandy and water, and dancing commenced again. By this time the visitors began to drop away in twos and threes, and even the fair Celestine, to whom I had never ceased paying the most devoted attention, declared she could not stir another step. As for Oliphant, he had disappeared during supper, without a word of leave-taking to any one.

Matters being at this pass, I looked at my watch, and found that it was already half-past six o'clock; so having bade good night, or rather good morning, to Messieurs Jules, Gustave, and Adrien, and having, with great difficulty, discovered my own coat and hat among the miscellaneous collection in the adjoining bedroom, I prepared to escort Mademoiselle Celestine to her home.

"What, are you going already?" said Müller, encountering us on the landing, with a roll in one hand, and a Bologna sausage in the other.

"Already! why, my dear fellow, it is nearly seven o'clock!"

"*Qu'importe?* Come up to the supper-room and have some breakfast!"

"Not for the world!"

"Well, *chacun a son gout*. I am as hungry as a hunter."

"Can we not take you any part of your way?"

"No, thank you. I am a Quartier Latinist, *pur sang*, and lodge not a dozen yards hence. Stay, here is my address. Come and see me—you can't think how glad I shall be!"

"Indeed, I will come—and here is my card in exchange. Good night, Herr Müller."

"Good night, Marquis of Stanton Leigh; Mademoiselle Celestine, *au plaisir*."

So we shook hands, and parted, and I saw my innamorata home to her residence at No. 70 Rue Aubry le

Boucher, which was almost in my very road, and opened into the Marche des Innocents. She fell asleep upon my shoulder in the cab, and was only just sufficiently awake, when I left her, to accept all the *marrons glaces* which yet remained in the pockets of my paletot, and to remind me that I had promised to take her out next Sunday for a drive in the country, and a dinner at the Moulin Rouge.

It was now broad daylight, and the fountain in the Marche was sparkling in the sunshine, like a shower of diamonds. The business of the market was already at its height. The shops in the neighbouring streets were opening fast. The "iron tongue" of St. Eustache was calling the devout to early prayer. Fagged as I was, I felt that a walk through the fresh air would do me good; so I dismissed the cab, and reached my lodgings just as the sleepy *conçierge* had turned out with his night-cap and his broom, to sweep the hall, and open the establishment for the day. When I came down again, two hours later, after a nap and a bath, on my way to Dr. Lucet's, I found a *commissionnaire* waiting for me.

"*Tiens !*" said Madame Bouïsse (Madame Bouïsse was the wife of the *conçierge*) "*V'la !* here is M'sieur Leigh."

The man touched his cap, and handed me a letter.

"I was told to deliver it into no hands but those of M'sieur himself," said he.

The address was in Oliphant's writing. I tore the envelope open. It contained only a card, on the back of which, scrawled hastily in pencil, were the following words:—

"To have said good bye would have made our parting none the lighter. By the time you decipher this hieroglyphic, I shall be some miles on my way. Address Hotel de Russie, Berlin. Adieu, Damon; God bless you. H. O."

"How long is it since this letter was given to you?" said I, without taking my eyes from the card.

The *Commissionnaire* made no reply. I repeated the question, looked round impatiently, and found that the man was already gone.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CHATEAU DE BEAUREPAIRE.

"Mark yon old mansion frowning thro' the trees,  
Whose hollow turret woos the whistling breeze."

My acquaintance with Mademoiselle Celestine progressed rapidly; although, to confess the truth, I found myself much less deeply in love than I had at first supposed. For this disenchantment, fate and myself were alone to blame. It was not her fault if I had invested her with a thousand imaginary perfections; nor mine if the spell were broken as soon as I discovered my mistake.

Too impatient to wait till Sunday, I made my way on the Saturday afternoon to Rue Aubry-le-Boucher. I persuaded myself that I was bound to call on her, in order to conclude our arrangements for the following day. At all events, I argued, she might forget the engagement, or believe that I had forgotten it. So I went, taking with me a magnificent bouquet, and an embroidered satin bag, full of *marrons glacés*.

My divinity lived, as she had told me, *sous le toits*—and *sous les toits*, up seven pairs of very steep and dirty stairs, I found her. It was a large attic with a sloping roof, somewhat scantily furnished, and looking over a bristling expanse of chimney-pots, towards the twin towers of Notre Dame. There were some coloured prints of battles and shipwrecks wafered to the walls; a couple of flower-pots in the narrow space between the window-ledge and the coping outside; a dingy canary in a wicker cage; a rival mechanical cuckoo in a Dutch clock in the corner; a little bed, with striped hangings; a rush-bottomed *prie-dieu* chair, in front of a plain black crucifix, over which drooped a faded branch of consecrated palm;

and some few articles of household furniture of the humblest description. In all this, there was nothing vulgar. Under other circumstances, I might, perhaps, have even elicited somewhat of grace and poetry from these simple materials; but seen through an atmosphere of warm white steam that left an objectionable clamminess on the backs of the chairs, and caused even the door handle to be bursting into a tepid perspiration—seen under circumstances so painfully domestic, heightened, moreover, by the sight of my adored one standing in the middle of the room, up to her elbows in soap-suds, washing out the very dress in which she was to appear on the morrow—Good taste defend us! could anything be more painfully calculated to disturb the tender tenor of a lover's dreams? Fancy what Leander would have felt, if, after swimming across the Hellespont, he had surprised Hero at the washing-tub! Conceive Romeo's feelings, if he had scaled the orchard walls, only to find Juliet helping to hang out the family linen!

The worst part of it was, that my lovely Celestine was not in the least embarrassed. She evidently thought nothing of it. She regarded the washing-tub as a desirable piece of furniture, and was not even conscious that the act of 'soaping-in' was an unromantic occupation!

Such was the severity of this first blow, that I pleaded an engagement, presented my offerings (how dreadfully inappropriate they seemed!), and hurried away to a lecture on *materia medica* at the *Ecole Pratique*; that being a good, congenial, dismal entertainment for the evening!

Sunday came with the sunrise, and at midday, true as the clock of St. Eustache, I re-ascended the seven pairs of stairs, and knocked once more at the door of the *mansarde* where my Celestine dwelt. This time, my visit being anticipated, I found her dressed to receive me. She looked more fresh and charming than ever; and the lilac muslin, which I had seen in the washing-tub some eighteen or twenty hours before, became her to perfection. So did her

pretty green shawl, pinned closely at the throat, and worn as only a Frenchwoman would have known how to wear it. So did the white camelia and the moss-rose buds which she had taken out of my bouquet, and fastened at her waist. What I was not prepared for, however, was her cap. I had forgotten that your Parisian grisette would no more dream of wearing a bonnet than of crowning her head with feathers, and adorning her countenance with war-paint. It had totally escaped me that I, a bashful Englishman of twenty-one, nervously sensitive to ridicule, and gifted by nature with but little of the spirit of social defiance, must in broad daylight openly make my appearance in the streets of Paris, accompanied by a bonnetless grisette! What should I do, if I met Dr. Lucet? or Madame d'Argenteuil? or, worse than all, Madame de Launay? My obvious and only resource was to take her in whatever direction we should be least likely to meet any of my acquaintances. Where, oh fate! might that obscurity be found which, within the last five minutes, had become the dearest object of my desires?

"*Eh bien*, Monsieur Leigh," said Celestine, when my first compliments had been paid, "I am quite ready. Where are we going?" "We shall dine, *ma chere ange*," said I, absently, "at—let me see—at—"

"At the Moulin Rouge," interrupted she. "But that is six hours to come. In the meantime—"

"In the meantime—aye, in the meantime—what a delightful day for the time of year!"

"Shall it be Versailles?" suggested Celestine.

"Heaven forbid!" I ejaculated nervously.

Celestine opened her large eyes.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said she. "What is there so very dreadful in Versailles?"

I made no reply. I was passing all the suburbs in review before my mind's eye,—Belleme, Eughien, Fontenay aux Roses, St. Germain, Sceaux; even Fontainebleau and Compiègne.

The grisette pouted, and glanced at the clock.

"If Monsieur is as slow to start as he is to answer," said she, "we shall not get beyond the barriers to day!"

At this moment, I remembered to have heard of Montlhéry as a place when there was a forest, and a feudal ruin also; which was more to the purpose, as lying, at least, six and twenty miles south of Paris.

"My dear Mademoiselle Celestine," said I, "forgive me. I have planned an excursion which I am sure will please you infinitely better, than a mere common-place trip to Versailles. Versailles, on Sunday, is vulgar. You have heard, of course, Montlhéry—one of the most interesting places near Paris."

"I have read a romance called *The Tower of Montlhéry*," said Celestine.

"And that tower—that historical and interesting tower, is still standing! How delightful to wander among the ruins; to recall the stirring events which caused it to be besieged in the reign of—of either Louis the Eleventh, or Louis the Fourteenth, I don't remember which, and it doesn't signify; to explore the picturesque village, and ramble through the adjoining woods of St. Genevieve; to visit—"

"I wonder if we shall find any donkeys to ride," said Celestine, upon whom my eloquence was taking the desired effect.

"Donkeys!" I exclaimed, drawing, I am ashamed to say, upon my imagination. "Of course—hundreds of them!"

"Ah, ça! Then the sooner we go the better. Stay, I must just lock my door, and leave word with my neighbour on the next floor that I am gone out for the day!"

So she locked her door, and left the message, and we started. I was fortunate enough to find a close cab at the corner of the *marché*—she would have preferred an open one, but I overruled that objection on the score of time—

and before very long, we were seated in the cushioned fauteuils of a first-class compartment on the Orleans Railway, and speeding away towards Montlhéry.

It was with no trifling sense of relief that I found the place really picturesque, when we arrived. We had, it is true, to put up with a comfortless drive of three or four miles in a primitive, jolting, yellow omnibus, which crawled at stated hours of the day between the town and the station; but that was a minor evil, and we made the best of it. First of all, we strolled through the village—the clean, white, sunny village, where the people were sitting outside their doors playing at dominoes, and the cocks and hens were walking about like privileged inhabitants of the market-place. Then we had lunch at the *auberge* of the “Lion d’or;” then we went in to look at the little church (still smelling of incense from the last service) with its curious old altar-piece and monumental brasses; then we peeped through the iron gate of the melancholy *cimetière*, full of black crosses, and wreaths of *immortelles*. Last of all, we went to see the ruin, which stood on the summit of a steep and solitary rock, in the midst of a singularly level plain, and proved to be a round keep of gigantic strength and height, approached by two courtyards, and surrounded by the weed-grown and fragmentary traces of an extensive stronghold, nothing of which now remained save a few broken walls, three or four embrasured loopholes, an ancient well of incalculable depth, and the rusted teeth of a formidable portcullis. Here we paused awhile to rest, and admire the view; while Celestine, pleased as a child on a holiday, flung pebbles into the well, ate sugar-plums, and amused herself with my pocket-telescope.

“*Regardez !*” she cried, “there is the dome of the Pantheon ! I am sure it is the Pantheon—and to the right, far away, I see a town; little white houses, and a steeple—and there goes a steamer on the river—and there is the railway, and the railway station, and the long road by

which we came in the omnibus—. Oh, how nice it is, Monsieur Leigh, to look through a telescope !”

“Do me the favour, *ma belle*, to accept it—for my sake,” said I, thankful to find her so easily entertained. Besides, I was lying in a shady angle of old wall, puffing away at a cigar, with my hat over my eyes, and the soles of my boots levelled at the view. It is difficult to smoke and make love at the same time ; and I preferred the tobacco.

Celestine was enchanted, and thanked me in a thousand pretty, foolish phrases. She declared she saw ever so much farther and clearer with the glass, now that it was her own. She looked at me through it, and insisted that I should look at her. She picked out all sorts of marvellous objects, at all sorts of incredible distances. In short, she prattled and chattered till I began to think her quite charming again, and to forget all about the washing-tub. Presently we heard wandering sounds of music among the trees at the foot of the hill—sounds as of a violin and bagpipes, now coming with the wind from the west ; now dying away to the north ; now bursting out afresh, more merrily than ever, and leading off towards the village.

“*Tiens !* that must surely be a wedding !” said Celestine, drumming with her little feet against the side of the old well on which she was sitting.

“A wedding ! what connection subsists, pray, between the holy bands of matrimony, and a tune on the bagpipes ?”

“I don’t know what you mean by bagpipes—I only know that when people get married in the country, they always walk about with the musicians playing before them ; and what you hear yonder is a violin and a *cornemuse*.”

“A *cornemuse* !” I repeated. “What’s that ?”

“Oh, country music. A thing which you blow into with your mouth, and play upon with your fingers, and squeeze under your arm—like this.”

“Then it’s the same thing, *ma chère*,” said I, “a bagpipe and a *cornemuse*—a *cornemuse* and a bagpipe. Both of them national, popular, and frightful.”

"I'm so fond of music," said Celestine.

Not wishing to object to her tastes, and believing that this observation related to the music then audible, I made no reply.

"And I have never been to an opera," added she.

I was still silent, though from another motive.

"You will take me one night to the Italiens, or the Opera Comique, will you not, Monsieur Leigh?" pursued she, determined not to lose her opportunity.

I had now no resource but to promise; which I did, reluctantly.

"You would enjoy the Opera Comique far more than the Italiens," said I, thinking of Madame de Launay, and rapidly weighing the chances for and against the possibility of recognition. "At the first they sing in French—at the last, in Italian."

"Ah, bah! I should prefer the French," replied she, falling at once into the snare. "When shall it be, next week?"

"Ye—es; one evening next week."

"And what night?"

"Well, let me see—we had better wait, and consult the advertisements."

"*Déjà*! never mind the advertisements. Let it be Tuesday."

"Why Tuesday?"

"Because it is soon; and because I can get away earlier on Tuesdays if I ask leave."

I had, plainly, no chance of escaping.

"You would not prefer to see the great military piece at the Porte St. Martin?" I suggested. "There are three hundred real soldiers in it, and they fire real cannon."

"Not I! I have been to the Porte St. Martin, over and over again. Emile knew one of the scene-painter's assistants, and used to get tickets two or three times in a month."

"Then it shall be the Opera Comique," said I, with a sigh.

“ And on Tuesday evening next ? ”

“ On Tuesday evening next.”

At this moment, the piping and fiddling broke out afresh, and Celestine, who had scarcely taken the little telescope from her eye all the time, exclaimed that she saw the wedding-party going through the market-place of the town.

“ There they are—the musicians first, the bride and bridegroom next, and eight friends, all two and two ! There will be a dance, depend on it ! Let us go down to the town, and hear all about it ! Perhaps they might invite us to join them ; who knows ? ”

“ But you would not dance before dinner ? ”

“ *Eh mon Dieu !* I would dance before breakfast, if I had the chance. Come along. If we do not make haste, we may miss them.”

I rose, feeling, and I dare say, looking, like a martyr; and we went down again into the town.

There we enquired of the first person who seemed likely to know—he was a dapper hairdresser, standing at his shop-door, with his hands in his apron-pockets, and a comb behind his ear—and were told that the wedding party had just passed through the village, on their way to the Chateau of Beaurepaire.

“ The Chateau of Beaurepaire ! ” said Celestine. “ What are they going to do there ?—what is there to see ? ”

“ It is an ancient mansion, Mademoiselle, very much visited by strangers,” replied the hairdresser, with exceeding politeness. “ Worthy of Mademoiselle’s distinguished attention—and Monsieur’s. Contains old furniture, old paintings, old china—stands in an extensive park—one of the lions of this neighbourhood, Mademoiselle—also Monsieur.”

“ To whom does it belong ? ” I asked, somewhat interested in this account.

“ That, Monsieur, is a question difficult to answer,” replied the fluent hairdresser, running his fingers through his locks, and dispersing a gentle odour of rose-oil. It was



formerly the property of the ancient family of Beaurepaire. The last Marquis de Beaurepaire, with his wife and daughter, was guillotined in 1793—some say that the young heir was saved; and an individual asserting himself to be that heir did actually put forward a claim to the estate, some twenty, or five and twenty years ago, but lost his cause for want of sufficient proof. In the meantime, it had passed into the hands of a wealthy republican family, descended, it is said, from General Dumouriez. This family held it till within the last four years, when two or three fresh claimants came forward; so that it is now the object of a law-suit which may last till every brick of it falls to ruin, and every tree about it withers away. At present, a man and his wife have charge of the place, and visitors are permitted to see it any day between twelve and four.

"I should like to see the old place," said I, now more interested than ever.

"And I should like to see how the bride is dressed," said Celestine, "and if the bridegroom is handsome."

"Well, let us go—not forgetting to thank Monsieur *le Perruquier* for his polite information.

Monsieur *le Perruquier* fell into what dancing-masters call the first position, and bowed elaborately.

"Most welcome, Mademoiselle—and Monsieur," said he. "Straight up the road—past the church about a quarter of a mile—old iron gates—can't miss it. Good afternoon, Mademoiselle—also Monsieur."

Following his directions, we came presently to the gates—rusty and broken-hinged, with an obliterated scutcheon surmounting each, and traces of old gilding still showing faintly here and there upon their battered scrolls and bosses. One of them was standing open, and had evidently been standing so for years; while the other had as evidently been closed equally long, so that the deep grass had grown rankly all about it, and the very bolt was crusted over with a yellow lichen. Between the two, an ordinary wooden gate had been put up, and this gate was

opened for us by a little blue-bloused urchin in a pair of huge *sabôts*, who, thinking we belonged to the bridal party, pointed up the dusky avenue, and said with a grin,

*"Toute droite, M'sieur—they sont passés par là!"*

*Par là*, "under the shade of melancholy boughs," with the dead leaves showering down fast around us, and our feet deep-sunken in a rustling carpet of those which had been shed daily and nightly for the last two or three weeks, we went accordingly. Far away on either side stretched dim vistas of neglected park-land, deep with coarse grass and weeds, and, where the trees were thickest, all choked with a brambly undergrowth. After about a quarter of a mile of this dreary avenue we came to a broad area of several acres, laid out in the Italian style with fountains and terraces, at the upper end of which stood the house—a thorough, feudal, red-bricked, *moyen-age* French chateau, with all sorts of irregular wings, and steep-slated roofings, pierced by innumerable windows, and fantastic steeple-topped turrets, sheeted with lead, and capped with grotesque gilded weathercocks. The principal front, facing the terraces, had been repaired and ornamented in the style of the Renaissance, with little foliated entablatures above the doors and windows; whilst a double flight of steps leading up to a grand entrance, almost on the level of the first storey, like the famous double staircase of Fontainebleau, had been patched on in the very centre, to the manifest disfigurement of the building. Most of the windows were shuttered up, and as we drew nearer, the general evidences of desolation became every moment more apparent. The steps of the terraces were clothed with patches of brown and golden moss. The stone-urns were some of them fallen in the deep grass and some broken. There were gaps in the rich balustrade, here and there; and the two great fountains on either side of the lower terrace had long since ceased to fling up their feathery columns towards the sun. In the middle of one, a broken Pan, nose-less and arm-less, turned up a stony face of mute appeal, as if imploring us to

free him from the parasitic jungle of aquatic plants which flourished rankly around him, in the basin. In the other, a stalwart river god, with his finger on his lip, seemed listening for the music of those waters which now scarcely stirred amid the roots of the flowering weeds and tangled flags that clustered at his feet.

Passing all these—as well as the flower-beds choked with field-blossoms, and brambles, and long waving grasses; and the once quaintly clipped myrtle, and box-trees, all flinging out fantastic arms of later growth—we came to the uppermost terrace, which was paved in curious patterns of stars and arabesques, with stones alternately round and flat. Here a good-humoured cleanly peasant-woman came clattering out in her *sabôts* from a side-door, key in hand, preceded us up the double flight of steps, unlocked the great door, and admitted us.

The interior, like the front, had been modernized some hundred and fifty years before, and, instead of presenting the peculiar features of a feudal residence, resembled a little formal Versailles or miniature Fontainebleau. Dismantled halls paved with white marble; panelled ante-chambers an inch deep in dust; dismal *salons* all gilded, and wainscotted, with Renaissance arabesques, and huge looking-glasses, cracked and mildewed, and mended with pasted seams of blue paper; boudoirs with faded Watteau panellings; corridors with painted ceilings, where mythological divinities marvellously foreshortened on a sky-blue ground, were seen surrounded by rose-coloured Cupids, and garlanded with ribbons and flowers; bed-rooms, some containing grim catafalques of beds with gilded cornices, and funereal plumes, some empty, some full of stored-up furniture, fast going to decay—all these, in endless number, we traversed, conducted by the good-tempered Concierge, whose heavy *sabôt* woke a thousand ghostly echoes from floor to floor, and whose cheerful voice reverberated quite unnaturally round the lofty ceilings.

At length, through an ante-chamber lined with a double

file of grim old family portraits—some so blackened with age and dust as to be totally indistinguishable, and others bulging hideously out of their frames—we came to the library, a really noble room, lofty, panelled with walnut wood, floored with polished oak, and looking over a wide expanse of level country. Long ranges of empty bookshelves, fenced in with broken wire-work, ran round the walls. The painted ceiling represented, as usual, the heavens, and some pagan divinities. A dumb old time-piece, originally constructed to tell the months, the days of the year, and the hours, stood on a massive corner bracket near the door. Long antique mirrors, in heavy black frames, reached from floor to ceiling between each of the windows; and in the centre of the room, piled all together, and everywhere hung with a thick drapery of cobwebs, were a dozen or so of old carved chairs, screens, and footstools, which had once been rich in velvets, brocades, and gilded leather, but now looked as if a touch would crumble them to dust. Over the great carved fireplace, however, hung a painting upon which my attention became rivetted as soon as I entered the room—a painting yellow with age, covered with those minute cracks which are like wrinkles on the face of antique art, coated with dust, and yet so singularly attractive that, having once observed it, I looked at nothing else.

If was the half-length portrait of a young lady in the costume of the reign of Louis XVI. One hand was represented resting on a stone-urn; the other was raised to her bosom, holding a thin blue scarf, that seemed to flutter in the wind. Her dress was of white satin, cut low and square, with a stomacher of lace and pearls. She also wore pearls in her hair, on her white arms, and on her whiter neck. Thus much for the mere adjuncts; as for the face—ah, how can I ever describe that pale, perfect, tender face, with its waving brown hair, and soft brown eyes, and that steadfast perpetual smile that seemed to light the eyes from within, and to dwell in the corners of the lips without parting or moving them? It was like a face seen in a dream, or the

imperfect image which seems to come between us and the page, as we read of Imogen asleep.

"Who was this lady?" I asked, eagerly.

The *conçierge* nodded, and rubbed her hands.

"Aha! M'sieur," said she, "'tis the best painting in the chateau, as folks tell me. M'sieur is a connoisseur."

"But do you know whom it represents?"

"To be sure I do, M'sieur. It is the portrait of the last Marquise—the one who was guillotined, poor soul, with her husband, in—let me see—surely in 1793!"

"What an exquisite creature! Look, Celestine, did you ever see anything so beautiful?"

"Beautiful!" repeated the grisette, with a side-long glance at one of the mirrors. "Beautiful, with such a coiffure, and such a boddice! *Ciel!* how tastes differ!"

"But her face, Celestine!"

"What of her face? I'm sure it's plain enough."

"Plain! good patience, what..." but it was not worth while to argue it. I pulled out one of the old chairs, and by that help climbed near enough to dust the surface of the painting with my handkerchief.

"Would to heaven that I could buy it!" I exclaimed.

Celestine burst into a loud laugh.

"*Grand Dieu!*" said she, half pettishly, "if you are so much in love with it as all that, I dare say it would not be difficult!"

The *conçierge* shook her head.

"Everything on this estate is locked up," said she. "Nothing can be sold, nothing given away, nothing even repaired, till the *procès* is ended."

I sighed, and came down reluctantly from my perch. Celestine was visibly impatient—she had seen the wedding-party going down one of the walks at the back of the house—and the *conçierge* was waiting to let us out, and lock the house up after us. I drew her aside, and slipped a liberal gratuity into her hand.

"If I were to come down here one day with a friend of

mine who is a painter," I whispered, "would you have any objection, Madame, to allow him to make a little sketch of that portrait?"

The *conçierge* looked into her palm, seeing the value of the coin, smiled, hesitated, put her finger to her lip, and said—

"*Ma foi*, M'sieur, I believe I have no business to allow it; but—to oblige a gentleman like you—if there was nobody about——"

I nodded. We understood each other sufficiently, and no more was needed.

Once out of the house, Mademoiselle Celestine pouted, and took upon herself to be sulky—a disposition which was by no means lessened when, after traversing the park in various directions in search of the bridal company, we found that they had gone out, long ago, by a gate at the other side of the estate, and were by this time piping, most probably, in the adjoining parish.

It was now nearly five o'clock and getting on towards dusk, so we hastened back through the village, cast a last glance at the dim old tower on its steep solitude, consigned ourselves to the yellow omnibus, and in due time were once more flying along the iron road towards Paris. The rapid motion, the dignity of occupying a first-class seat, and, above all, the prospect of an excellent dinner, soon brought my fair companion round again, and by the time we reached the Moulin Rouge, she was all vivacity and good temper. About that dinner, the less I venture upon saying, the better; I am humiliated when I recall all that I suffered, and all that she did. I blush even now when I remember how she cooled her soup with her breath, put her knife in her mouth, and picked her teeth with her shawl-pin. What possessed her, that she would persist in calling the waiter "*Monsieur*"; and why, in heaven's name, need she have clapped her hands when I ordered the champagne? To say that I had no appetite—that I wished myself at the antipodes—that I longed to sink into my

boots, to smother the waiter, or to do anything equally desperate and unreasonable, is to express but a tithe of the anguish I endured. I bore it, however, in silence, little dreaming that a worse trial was yet in store for me.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

I FALL A SACRIFICE TO MRS. GRUNDY.

"A WORD with you, if you please, Stanton Leigh," said Dr Lucet, "when you have finished copying those prescriptions."

Dr. Lucet was standing with his feet firmly planted in the tiger-skin rug, and his back to the fire. I was busily writing at the study table, watching the declining daylight, and glancing anxiously, from time to time, at the skeleton clock upon the chimney-piece; for it was getting on fast towards five, and at half-past six I was to take Celestine to the Opera Comique. As perverse fortune would have it, my *gouverneur* had this afternoon given me more desk-work than usual, and I began to doubt whether I should be able to dine, dress, and reach the theatre in time if he detained me much longer.

"But you need be in no haste," added he, looking at his watch. "That is to say, upon my account."

I bowed nervously—I was always nervous in his presence—and tried to write faster than ever; but, feeling his cold, blue eye upon me, made a blot, smeared it with my sleeve, left one word out, wrote another twice over, and was continually tripped up by my pen, which sputtered hideously, and covered the page with florid passages in little round spots, which only needed tails to become crotchets and quavers. At length, just as the clock struck the hour, I finished my task, and laid aside my pen.

Dr. Lucet coughed preparatorily.

"It is some time," said he, "since you have given me any news of your father. Do you often hear from him?"

"Not very often, sir," I replied. "About once in every three weeks. He is not fond of letter-writing."



Dr. Lucet took a packet of papers from his breast pocket, and ruffling them over, said, somewhat indifferently—

“Very true—very true. His notes are brief and few, but always to the purpose. I heard from him this morning.”

“Indeed, sir?”

“Yes—here is his letter. It encloses a remittance of seventy-five pounds; fifty of which are for you, and twenty-five for me, to be applied to the defrayal of your expenses at the Ecole de Medicine and the Ecole Pratique.”

I was delighted.

“Both are made payable through my banker,” continued Dr. Lucet, “and I am to take charge of your share till you require it; which cannot be just yet, as I understand from this letter that your father supplied you with the sum of one hundred and ten pounds on leaving England.”

My delight went down to zero.

“Does my father say positively that I am not to have it now, sir?” I asked hesitatingly.

“He says, as I have already told you, that it is to be yours when you require it.”

“And if I require it very shortly, sir—in fact, if I require it now?”

“You ought not to require it now,” replied the doctor, with a cold, scrutinising stare. “You ought not to have spent one hundred and ten pounds in five months.”

I looked down in silence. I had spent it within a very few pounds, and I had to thank Madame de Launay for the facility with which it had flown. It was not to be denied that my course of lessons in practical politeness had been somewhat expensive.

“How have you spent it?” asked Dr. Lucet, never removing his eyes from my face.

I might have answered, in bouquets, opera stalls, and riding horses; in dress coats, tight boots, and white kid

gloves; in new books, new music, bon-bons, cabs, perfumery, and the like inexcusable follies. But I held my tongue instead, and said nothing.

Dr. Lucet looked again at his watch.

"Have you kept any entries of your expenses since you came to Paris?" said he.

"Not with—with any regularity, sir," I replied.

He took out his pencil-case and pocket-book.

"Let us try, then," said he, "to make an average calculation of what they might be, in five months."

I began to get very uncomfortable.

"I believe your father paid your travelling expenses!"

I bowed affirmatively.

"Leaving you the clear sum of one hundred and ten pounds."

I bowed again.

"Allowing, then, for your rent—say twenty francs per week," said he, entering the figures as he went on, "which will be four hundred in five months—for your living thirty, which makes six hundred—for your clothing seventy-five per month, which makes three hundred and seventy-five, and ought to be quite enough for a young man of moderate tastes—for your washing and fire-wood perhaps forty per month, which makes two hundred—and for your incidental expenses, say twenty-five per week, which makes five hundred,—we arrive at a total of two thousand and seventy-five francs, which, reduced to English money, at the average standard of twenty-five francs to the sovereign, represents the exact sum of eighty-three pounds. Do I make myself understood?"

I bowed, for the third time.

"Of the original hundred and ten pounds, we now have twenty-seven not accounted for. May I ask how much of that surplus you have left?"

"About—not more than—than a hundred and thirty or forty francs," I replied, stripping the feathers off all the pens in succession, without knowing it.

"Have you any debts?"

"A—a few, sir."

"Tailors' bills?"

"Yes, sir."

"What others?"

"A—a couple of months' rent, I believe, sir."

"Is that all?"

"N—not quite."

Dr. Lucet frowned, and looked again at his watch.

"Be good enough, Stanton Leigh," said he, "to spare me this amount of useless interrogation, by at once stating the nature and amount of the rest."

"I—I positively cannot state the amount, sir," I said, absurdly trying to get the paper-weight into my waist-coat pocket, and then putting it down in great confusion.

"I—I have an account a Monceau's in the Rue Duphot, and—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Dr. Lucet; "but who is Monceau?"

"Monceau's—Monceau's livery-stables, sir."

Dr. Lucet slightly raised his eyebrows, and entered the name.

"And at Lavoisier's, on the Boulevard Poissonnière—"

"What is sold, pray, at Lavoisier's?"

"Gloves, perfumes, hosiery, ready-made linen—"

"Enough—you can proceed."

"I have also a bill at—at Barbet's, in the Passage de l'Opera."

"And Barbet is—?"

"A—a florist!" I replied very reluctantly.

"Humph!—a florist!" observed Dr. Lucet, again transfixing me with the cold, blue eyes. "To what amount do you suppose that you are indebted to Monsieur Barbet?"

I looked down, and became utterly unintelligible.

"Fifty francs—eh?"

"I—I fear, more than—than—"

"A hundred? A hundred and fifty? Two hundred?"

"About two hundred, I suppose, sir," I said desperately.

"Two hundred francs—that is to say, eight pounds English—to your florist? Really, Mr. Stanton Leigh, you must be singularly fond of flowers!"

I looked at my boots in silence.

"Have you a conservatory attached to your rooms?"

The skeleton clock struck the half hour.

"Excuse me, sir," I said, driven now to the last extremity, "but—but I have an engagement which—in short, I will, if you please, make out a list of—of these items, ascertaining the correct amount of each; and when once paid, I will endeavour—I mean, it is my earnest desire, to—to limit my expenditure strictly to—in short to study economy for the future. If, in the meantime, you will have the goodness to excuse me—"

"One word, Stanton Leigh. Will the fifty pounds cover your debts?"

"Quite, sir, I am confident."

"And leave you something in hand for your current expenses?"

"Indeed, I fear very little."

"In that case, what will you do?"

This was a terrible question, and one for which I could find no answer.

"Write to your father for another remittance—eh?"

"I—upon my word, I dare not, sir," I faltered.

"Then you would go in debt again?"

"I really fear—even with the strictest economy—I—"

"Be so obliging as to let me have your seat," said Dr. Lucet thrusting the obnoxious note-book into his pocket and taking my place at the desk, from which he took a couple of cards, and a printed paper.

"This ticket," said he, "admits the holder to the anatomical course for the term now beginning, and this to all the lectures at the Ecole Pratique for the whole season. Both are in my gift by virtue of my position in the *Faculté*. The first is worth fifty francs, and the second four hundred."

I ought, perhaps, in strict justice, only to bestow them upon some needy and deserving individual ; however, to save you from debt, or a very unpleasant alternative, I will fill them in with your name and, when you bring me all your bills receipted, I will transfer to your account the four hundred and fifty francs which I must, otherwise, have paid for your courses out of the remittance forwarded by your father for that purpose. Understand, however, that I must first have the receipts, and that I expect you, on the word of a gentleman, to commit no more follies, and to contract no more debts."

"Oh, sir!" I exclaimed, "how can I ever—"

"No thanks, I beg," interposed Dr. Lucet. "Prove your gratitude by your conduct; do not trouble yourself to talk of it."

"Indeed, sir, you may depend—"

"And no promises either, if you please. I attach no kind of value to them. Stay—here is my cheque for the fifty pounds forwarded by your father. With that sum extricate yourself from debt. You know the rest."

Hereupon Dr. Lucet replaced the cards and the printed form, double locked his desk, and, with a slight gesture of the hand, frigidly dismissed me.

I left the house quite chopfallen. I was relieved, it is true, of the incubus of debt ; but then how small a figure I cut in the eyes of Dr. Lucet ! Besides, I was small for the second time—reproved for the second time—lectured, helped, put down, and pooh-poohed, for the second time ! Could I have peeped at myself just then through the wrong end of a telescope, I vow I could not have looked smaller, according to my own estimation !

I had no time to dine ; so I despatched a cup of coffee and a roll on my way home, and went hungry to the theatre.

Celestine was got up with immense splendour for this occasion ; greatly to her own satisfaction, and my disappointment. Having hired a small private box in the least

conspicuous part of the theatre, I had gone to the still more cowardly length of endeavouring to transform my grisette into a woman of fashion. I had bought her a pink and white opera cloak, a pretty little fan, a pair of white kid gloves, and a bouquet. With these she wore a decent white muslin dress furnished out of the limited resources of her own wardrobe, and a wreath of white roses, the work of her own clever fingers. Thus equipped, she was far less pretty than in her coquettish little grisette cap, and looked, I regret to say, much less like a lady than ever—circumstances which were rendered only the more aggravating by her own undisguised delight in her appearance.

“Are my flowers all right? Does my dress look crushed? Is the hood of my cloak in the middle of my back?” were the questions she addressed to me every moment. In the ante-room she took advantage of each mirror as we passed. In the lobby I caught her trying to look at her own back. When we reached our box she pulled her chair to the very centre of it, and sat there, as if she expected to be admired by the whole audience.

“My dear Celestine,” I remonstrated, “sit back here, facing the stage. You will see much better—besides, it is your proper seat, being the only lady in the box.”

“Ah *mon Dieu*! then I cannot see the house—and how pretty it is! Ever so much prettier than the *Gaiété*, or the *Porte St. Martin*!”

“You can see the house by peeping behind the curtain.”

“As if I were ashamed to be seen! *Par exemple*!”

“Nay, as you please. I only advise you according to custom and fashion.”

Celestine pouted, and unwillingly conceded a couple of inches.

“I wish I had brought the little telescope you gave me last Sunday,” said she, presently. “There is a gentleman with one down there in the stalls.”

“A telescope at the opera! the gods forbid! Here, however, is my opera-glass, if you like to use it.”

Celestine turned it over, curiously, and peeped first through one tube, and then through the other.

"Which one ought I to look through?" asked she.

"Both, of course."

"Both! How can I?"

"Why thus—as you would look through a pair of spectacles."

"*Ciel!* I can't manage that! I can never look through anything without covering up one eye with my hand."

"Then I think you had better be contented with your own charming eyes, *ma belle*," said I, nervously. "How do you like your bouquet?"

Celestine sniffed at it as if she were taking snuff, and pronounced it perfect. Just then the opera began. I withdrew into the shade, and Celestine was silenced for a while in admiration of the scenery and the dresses. By and bye, she began to yawn.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" said she, "when will they have done singing? I have not heard a word, all this time."

"But everything is sung, *ma chère*, in an opera."

"What do you mean? Is there no play?—no plot?"

"This is the play; only instead of speaking their words, they sing them."

Celestine shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, bah!" said she. "How stupid! I had rather see the *Closerie des Genets* at the Gaiété, if that is to be the case the whole evening. Oh, dear! there is such a pretty lady come into the opposite box, in such a beautiful blue *glacé* trimmed with black velvet and lace!"

"Hush! you must not talk while they are singing!"

"*Tiens!* it is no pleasure to come out and be dumb. But do just see the lady in the opposite box! She looks exactly as if she had walked out of a fashion-book."

"My dear child, I don't care one pin to look at her," said I, preferring to keep as much out of sight as possible.

"To admire your pretty face is enough for me."

Celestine squeezed my hand affectionately.

"That is just as Emile used to talk to me," said she.

I felt by no means flattered.

"*Regardez donc !*" said she, pulling me by the sleeve, just as I was standing up, a little behind her chair, looking at the stage. "That lady in the blue *glacé* never takes her eyes from our box ! She points us out to the gentleman who is with her—do look !"

I turned my glass in the direction to which she pointed, and recognised—Madame de Launay !

I turned hot and cold, red and white, all in one moment, and shrank back like a snail that has been touched, or a sea-anemone at the first dig of the naturalist.

"Does she know you ?" asked Celestine.

"I—I—probably—that is to say—I have met her in society."

"And who is the gentleman ?"

That was just what I was endeavouring to ascertain for myself. It was not Chapuis. It was no one whom I had ever seen before. It was a short, fat, pale man, with a bald head, and a ribbon in his button-hole.

"Is he her husband ?" pursued Celestine.

The suggestion flashed upon me like a revelation. Had I not heard that M. de Launay was coming home from Algiers ? Of course it was he. No doubt of it. A little vulgar, fat, bald man ! — Pshaw ! just the sort of husband that she deserved !

"How she looks at me !" said Celestine.

I felt myself blush, so to speak, from head to foot.

"Good heavens ! my dear girl," I exclaimed, "take your elbows off the front of the box !"

Celestine complied, with a pettish little grimace.

"And, for mercy's sake, don't hold your head as if you feared it would tumble off !"

"It is the flowers," said she. "They tickle the back of my neck, whenever I move my head. I am much more comfortable in my cap."

"Well, make the best of it, and listen to this song."



It was the great tenor ballad of the evening. The house was profoundly silent; the first wandering chords of a harp were heard behind the scenes; and Duprez began. In the very midst of one of his finest and tenderest *sostenuto* passages, Celestine sneezed—and such a sneeze!—you might have heard it out in the lobbies. An audible titter ran round the house. I saw Madame de Launay cover her face with her handkerchief, and yield to an irrepressible fit of laughter. As for the tenor, he cast a withering glance up at the box, and made a marked pause, before resuming his song. Merciful powers! what crime had I committed that I should be visited with such a punishment as this?

“Wretched girl!” I exclaimed, savagely, “what have you done?”

“Done, *mon ami*!” said Celestine, innocently. “Why, I fear I have taken cold.”

I groaned aloud.

“Taken cold!” I muttered to myself. “Would to heaven you had taken poison!”

“*Qu’est ce que c’est?*” asked she.

But it was not worth while to reply. I gave myself up to fate. I determined to remonstrate no more. I flung myself on a seat at the back of the box, and made up my mind to bear all that might yet be in store for me. When she openly ate a stick of *sucré d’orge* after this, I said nothing. When she applauded with both hands, I endured in silence. At length her performance came to a close, and the curtain fell. Madame de Launay had left before the last act, so I ran no danger of encountering her on the way out, which was some consolation; but I was profoundly miserable, nevertheless. As for Celestine, she, poor child, had not enjoyed her evening at all, and was naturally out of temper. We quarrelled tremendously in the cab, and parted without having made it up. It was all my fault. How could I be such a fool as to suppose that, with a few shreds and patches of finery, I could make a lady of a grisette?

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A MORNING VISIT.

WEEKS went by. The last dead leaves disappeared from the tall trees in the gardens of the Tuileries. The *al-fresco* Theatres in the Champs Elysées closed for the season. Ices ceased to be in demand at the Rotonde in the Palais Royal; and the little marble-tables and out-of-door benches were finally removed from the *pavé* in front of the Cafés on the Boulevards. November, and the last lingering traditions of autumn were gone by, and the popular mind turned instinctively towards Christmas time, and Christmas jollities. In the meanwhile, my debts were paid, which was a great relief; and my love-affair with Mademoiselle Celestine had flourished, faded, and fallen to decay—which was a greater relief still. We never made up that quarrel of the Opera Comique, and I had never desired that we should. On the contrary, I was exceedingly glad of the opportunity to withdraw my attentions; so I wrote her a polite little note in which I expressed my regret that our dispositions were so uncongenial and our paths in life so far apart, wished her every happiness, assured her that I should always remember her with friendly regard, and signed my name with a tremendous flourish at the bottom of the second page. With the note, however, I sent her a raised pie and a winter shawl, of which I begged her acceptance in token of amity, and as neither of them were returned, I concluded that she ate the one and wore the other, and that there was peace between us.

From Oliphant, although I had written to him several times, I heard seldom, and always briefly. His first note was dated from Berlin, and those succeeding, from Vienna. He seemed restless, bitter, dissatisfied with life, with him-

self, and with the world. Naturally unfit for the life of a lounge, his active nature, now that it had to contend with the irritation of a hope deferred, needed more than ever some field for work, some food for ambition. "My sword-arm," he wrote in one of his letters, "is weary of its holiday. There are times when I long for the smell of gunpowder, and the thunder of battle. I am sick to death of churches and picture-galleries, operas, dilliticism, white-kid-gloving, and all the hollow shows and seemings of society. Sometimes I regret having left the army—at others I rejoice; for, after all, in these piping times of peace, to be a soldier is to be a mere painted puppet—a thing of pipe-clay and gold bullion, an expensive scare-crow, an elegant Guy Fawkes, a sign, not of what is, but of what has been, and yet may be again. For my part, I care not to take the livery without the service. Pshaw! will things never mend? Are the good old times, and the good old international hatreds gone by for ever? Shall we never again have a thorough, seasonable, wholesome, continental war? This place (Vienna) would be worth fighting for, if one had the chance. I sometimes amuse myself by planning a siege, when I ride round the fortifications, as is my custom of an afternoon."

In another, after telling me that he had been reading some books of travel in Egypt and Central America, he said, "Next to a military life I think that of a traveller—a genuine traveller, who turns his back upon railroads and guides—must be the most exciting and the most enviable under heaven. Since reading these books, I dream of the jungle and the desert, and fancy that a buffalo-hunt must be almost as fine sport as a charge of cavalry. Oh, what a weary exile this is! I feel as if the very air were stagnant around me, and I, like the accursed vessel that carried the ancient mariner,—

'As idle as a painted ship,  
Upon a painted ocean.'

Sometimes, though rarely, he mentioned Madame

d'Argenteuil, and then very guardedly, seldom specifying her by name, and never speaking of her as his wife.

"That morning," he wrote, "comes back to me with all the vagueness of a dream—you will know what morning I mean, and why it fills so shadowy a page in the book of my memory. And it might as well have been a dream, for ought of present peace or future hope that it has brought me. I often think that I was selfish when I exacted that pledge from her. I do not see of what good it can be to either her or me, or in what sense I can be said to have gained even the power to protect and serve her. Would that I were rich; or that she and I were poor together, and dwelling far away in some American wild, under the shade of primeval trees, "the world forgetting; by the world forgot." I should enjoy the life of a Canadian settler—so free, so rational, so manly. How happy we might be—she with her children, her garden, her books; I with my dogs, my gun, my lands! What a curse it is, this spider's web of civilisation, that hems and cramps us in on every side, and from which not all the armour of common sense is sufficient to preserve us!"

It was after receiving the last of these that I called one morning upon Madame d'Argenteuil. My visit had been too long deferred already, and it was not without some little sense of shortcoming that I made my way at last to her door, and found myself ushered upstairs into a pretty apartment, the windows of which looked into the Rue Castellane.

At the first glance, seeing her open work-table and empty chair, I thought myself alone in the room; when a low snarl, and a muttered "*Sac-r-r-re!*—down, Bijou!" drew my attention to the fact of a gentleman extended at full length upon the sofa, and a vicious-looking terrier crouched beneath it.

The gentleman lifted his head from the sofa cushions; stared at me; bowed carelessly; struggled to his feet; and seizing the poker, lunged furiously at the fire, as if he had a

spite against it, and would have put it out if he could. This done, he yawned aloud, flung himself into the nearest easy-chair, and rang the bell.

"More coals, Henri," said he, to the servant who appeared in reply. "And—stop a moment—a bottle of Seltzer water."

The man hesitated.

"I do not think, monsieur," said he, "that there is any Seltzer water in the house; but ——"

"Confound you, you never have anything in the house at the moment that one requires it," interrupted the gentleman irritably.

"I can send out for some immediately, if monsieur wishes."

"Send for it then; and remember, when next I ask for it, let there be some at hand."

"Yes, monsieur."

"And—Henri!"

"Yes, monsieur?"

"Bid them be quick. I hate to be kept waiting!"

The servant murmured his usual "Yes, monsieur," and disappeared; but with a look of such subdued dislike and impatience in his face, as would scarcely have been acceptable to the provoker had he chanced to surprise it.

In the meantime the dog had never ceased growling; whilst I, in default of something better to do, stooped over an album, and took advantage of a neighbouring mirror to observe more accurately the outward appearance of this authoritative occupant of Madame d'Argenteuil's drawing-room.

He was a small, pallid, slender man, of about thirty-five or seven years of age; with delicate, almost effeminate features, and hair thickly sprinkled with grey. His fingers, white and taper as a woman's, were covered with rings. His dress was careless, but that of a gentleman. Glancing at him even thus furtively, I could not help observing the worn lines about his temples, the mingled languor and ir-

ritability of his every gesture, the restless suspicion of his eye, and the hard curves about his handsome mouth.

"*Mille tonnerres !*" said he, between his teeth, "come out Bijou—come out, I say!"

The dog came out, unwillingly, and changed the growl to a little whine of apprehension. His master immediately dealt him a smart kick that sent him crouching to the farther corner of the room, where he hid himself under a chair.

"I'll teach you to make that noise, you may depend," said he as he drew his chair closer to the fire, and bent over it, shiveringly. "A yelping brute, that would be all the better for hanging!"

Having sat thus for a few moments, he seemed to grow restless again, and, pushing back his chair, rose, looked out of the window, took a turn or two across the room, and paused at length to take a book from one of the side-tables. As he did this, our eyes met in the looking-glass, whereupon he turned hastily back to the window, and stood there whistling, till it occurred to him to ring the bell again.

"Did monsieur ring?" said the footman, once more making his appearance at the door.

"*Mort de ma vie !* yes. The Seltzer water."

"I have sent for it, monsieur."

"And it is not yet come?"

"Not yet, monsieur."

He muttered something to himself, and dropt back into the chair before the fire.

"Does Madame d'Argenteuil know that I am here?" he asked just as the servant, after lingering a moment, was about to leave the room.

"I delivered Monsieur le Vicomte's message, and brought back madame's reply," said the man, "half an hour ago."

"True—I had forgotten it. You may go."

He closed the door noiselessly, and had no sooner done so than he was re-called by another impatient peal.

"Here, Henri—have you told Madame d'Argenteuil that—that this gentleman is also waiting to see her?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Vicomte."

"*Eh bien ?*"

"And madame said she should be down in a few moments."

"*Sacredie !* go back then, and enquire—"

"Madame is here."

And, as the footman moved back respectfully, Madame d'Argenteuil came into the room, looking, perhaps, somewhat less pale, but, to my thinking, even more charming than usual. Her dark hair was gathered closely round her head in massive braids, displaying to their utmost advantage all the delicate curves of her throat and chin; whilst her rich morning dress, made of some dark material, and fastened at the throat by a round brooch of dead gold, fell in loose and ample folds about her, like the classic drapery of a young Roman matron. Coming at once to meet me, she extended a cordial hand, and said—

"I almost despaired of ever seeing you again. Had you forgotten your promise, that you have been so tardy to fulfil it?"

"Madame," I said, bending low over the slender hand that seemed to linger kindly in my own. "Had I dared to believe that you would honour me by remembering it, I should not have been so low as to take advantage of the permission it implied."

She smiled, and, turning to her other visitor, said—

"*Mon cousin*, suffer me to introduce to you my friend Monsieur Stanton Leigh—Monsieur le Vicomte Adrien de Marly!"

I had suspected this already. Who but he would have dared to assume that masterful insolence? Who but her suitor, and the rival of my friend? I detested him from that moment, and whether it was that my aversion manifested itself in my face, or that the cordiality of my welcome annoyed him, I know not; but his bow was even more distant than mine.

"I have been waiting here to see you, Helene," said he, and looking at his watch, "for the last three-quarters of an hour."

"I sent you word, *mon cousin*, that I was finishing a letter for the foreign post," said Madame d'Argenteuil, coldly, "and that I could not come sooner."

Monsieur de Marly bit his lip, and cast an impatient glance in my direction.

"Can you spare me a few moments alone, Helene?" he said.

"Alone, *mon cousin*?"

"Yes, upon a matter of business."

Madame d'Argenteuil sighed.

"If M. Leigh will be so indulgent as to excuse me for five minutes," she replied. "This way, *mon cousin*." So saying, she lifted a dark green curtain, beneath which they passed to a farther room, and were at once excluded from sight and hearing by the falling of its heavy folds.

They remained a long time away. So long, that I grew thoroughly weary of waiting, and (having turned over the illustrated books upon the table till I knew every print by heart, and having examined every painting on the walls till I could almost have told how many figures and trees there were in each) I turned to the window, as the idler's last resource, and watched the passers-by.

The life-tide of a Paris street, even though but a branch of one of its great arteries, is sure to be more entertaining and varied in character than that of a London thoroughfare.

There is more colour, in the first place, and more animation. Every third or fourth man is a blue-bloused artizan; every tenth, a soldier in showy uniform. Then comes the grisette in her white cap; and the lemonade-vendor with his fantastic pagoda, slung like a peep-show across his shoulders; and the peasant woman from Normandy, with her high-crowned head-dress; and the abbé all in black, with his shovel-hat pulled low over his eyes; and the mountebank selling pencils and lucifer-matches to the music of a hurdy gurdy; and the *gendarme*, who is the terror of street urchins; and the *gamin*, who



torments the *gendarme*; and the water-carrier, with his cart and his cracked bugle; and elegant ladies and gentlemen, who look in at shop windows, and hire seats, at two *sous* each in the Champs Elysées; and, of course, the English tourist reading "Galignani's Guide" as he goes along. Then, perhaps, a regiment marches pass with colours flying and trumpets braying; or a fantastic-looking funeral goes by, with a hearse like a four-post bed hung with black velvet and silver; or the peripatetic showman with his company of white rats establishes himself on the pavement opposite, till admonished to move on by the *sergent de ville*. What an ever-shifting panorama! What a kaleidoscope of colour and character! What a study for the humorist, the painter, or the poet!

Thinking thus, and watching the ever-flowing current as it hurried on below, I became aware of a very elegant cab, drawn by a showy chesnut, which dashed round the corner of the street, and came down the Rue Castellane at a pace that caused every head to turn as it went by. Almost before I had time to do more than observe that it was driven by a mustachioed and lavender-kidded gentleman, it drew up before the house, and a trim tiger jumped down, and thundered at the door. At that moment the gentleman, taking advantage of the pause to light a cigar, looked up, and I recognised the black moustache and sinister countenance of Monsieur de Longueville.

"A gentleman has called for Monsieur le Vicomte," said the servant, drawing back the green curtain, and opening a vista into the room beyond.

"Request him to walk upstairs," said the voice of de Marly, from within.

"I have done so, monsieur; but he prefers to wait in his cabriolet."

"Pshaw!—confound it!—say that I'm coming."

The servant withdrew. I heard the words "perfectly safe investment—present convenience—unexpected demand," rapidly uttered by Monsieur de Marly; and then

they both came back, he looking flushed and angry—she paler than before, but calm as ever.

“Then I shall call on you again to-morrow, Helene,” said he plucking nervously at his glove. “You will have had time to reflect. You will see matters differently.”

Madame d’Argenteuil shook her head.

“Reflection will not change my opinion,” she said gently. “It can but strengthen it.”

“Well, shall I send Lejeune to you? He acts as solicitor to the company, and—”

“*Mon cousin*,” interposed the lady, “I have already given you my decision—why pursue the question farther? I do not wish to see Monsieur Lejeune, and I have no speculative tastes whatever.”

Monsieur de Marly, with a suppressed exclamation that sounded like a curse, rent his glove right in two, and then, as if annoyed at the self-betrayal, crushed up the fragments in his hand, and laughed uneasily.

“All women are alike,” said he, with an impatient shrug. “They know nothing of the world, and place no faith in those who are competent to advise them. I had given you credit, my charming cousin, for broader views.”

Madame d’Argenteuil smiled, without replying, and caressed the little dog, which had come out from under the sofa to fondle round her.

“Poor Bijou,” said she “pretty Bijou! Do you take good care of him, *mon cousin*?”

“Upon my soul, not I,” returned de Marly, carelessly. “Lecroix feeds him, I believe, and superintends his general education.”

“Who is Lecroix?”

“My valet, courier, body-guard, letter-carrier, and general *factotum*. A useful vagabond, without whom I should scarcely know my right hand from my left!”

“Poor Bijou! I fear, then, that your chance of being remembered is small indeed!” said Madame d’Argenteuil compassionately.

But Monsieur le Vicomte only whistled to the dog ; bowed haughtily to me ; kissed, with an insolent familiarity, at which she visibly recoiled, first the hand and then the cheek of his beautiful cousin, and passed out from the room. A moment afterwards, I saw him leap into Monsieur de Longueville's cabriolet, take his place at Monsieur de Longueville's side, and drive away, with Bijou following at a pace that might have tried a grey-hound.

As soon as he was gone, Madame d'Argenteuil turned to me, her whole face glowing with a new and vivid expression, and said—

“ Not a word of this, Monsieur Leigh, to Captain Oliphant. If you have seen anything, if you have heard anything, be silent, for his sake, as much as for mine. He has anxieties enough just now without the imposition of any new burthen ; and for such as fall to my own lot, I have courage to meet them, courage to bear them, courage to conquer them, were they ten times as many. ”

I promised all that she exacted, imploring only one thing from her indulgence.

“ And that ? ” said she.

“ And that, madame, is, that in any strait, or need, where a brother might interpose to help, or a faithful hand and heart be found of even the most trivial avail, you will remember that I ask no greater privilege than to be allowed to serve you. ”

She smiled, and, with a sweet earnestness that made my cheek glow, thanked and promised me.

“ I shall look upon you, henceforth, ” said she, “ as my knight errant, *sans peur, et sans reproche*. ”

Heaven knows that not all the lessons of all the moralists that ever wrote or preached since the world began, could have done me half the service of those simple words ! They made a man of me—filled me with an exaltation of purpose such as I had never known before—clothed me, so to speak, in the *toga virilis* of a generous devotion, based upon duty and honour, as upon a rock. I lounged to

prove myself *sans peur* ; I longed to deserve the *sans reproche*. I knew that I was not in love with her—no, not so far as one heart-beat might carry me ; but I was proud to possess her confidence, and share the secret which was hers and Oliphant's. Was she not the wife of my friend, and had he not asked me to watch over and protect her. Nay, did she not herself call me her knight-errant and accept my service ?

Nothing, perhaps, is so invaluable to a young man on entering life, as the friendship of a pure-minded and highly educated woman, who, removed too far above him to be regarded with passion, is possessed, nevertheless, of that personal charm which invests reverence with homage, and admiration with awe—whose good opinion becomes the measure of his own self-respect—and whose confidence is a sacred trust only to be parted from with honour.

Such an influence, remote, perhaps, and therefore less active than that which I have pictured, but, according to its degree, ennobling, and, in the best sense of the word, useful to me, at this time, was the friendship of Madame d'Argenteuil. I left her that morning morally stronger than I had felt in all my life before ; and, from that time forth, called on her at intervals, sometimes meeting Monsieur de Marly, on which occasions my stay was ever of the briefest ; and sometimes finding her alone, at which times we talked of books, of poetry, of art, of liberty, and of all those high and stirring things that alike move the sympathies of the cultivated woman, and rouse the eager enthusiasm of the young man. She became interested in me, and was pleased to honour me by showing that interest in many ways inexpressibly valuable to me then and thereafter. She took pains to educate my taste—opened to me unknown channels of study—led me to explore “ fresh fields and pastures new,” which, but for her help, I might not have chanced upon for years to come. Till this time my reading had been almost exclusively English or classical ; she sent me to the old French literature, the *Chan-*

*sons de Geste*, the metrical romances of the Trouvères, the Tableaux, the chronicles of Froissart, and Monstrelet, and Philip de Comines, and the poets and dramatists that followed.

These books opened a new world to me; and, having already access to an extensive public library, I plunged at once into a course of utterly fresh and delightful reading, ranging over all that wondrous and fertile tract of song and history that begins far away in the dim dawn of mediæval romance, and leads on through successive centuries to that new era that began with the revolution. With what avidity I devoured those picturesque chronicles, those autobiographies, those poems, and satires, and plays which I now know for the first time! What evenings I spent with the Duke of St. Simon, and Charlotte de Bavière, and old Brantôme! How I enjoyed Molière! How I relished Montaigne! How I laughed over Voltaire! How I learned to revel in quaint lore of times gone by—

“ Old legends of the monkish page,  
Traditions of the saint and sage,  
Tales that have the rime of age,  
And Chronicles of Eed ! ”

Nor was this all. I had, till now, admired art without any knowledge of its principles, its purposes, or its history. Madame d'Argenteuil put into my hands certain books and engravings that opened my eyes to a thousand wonders of which I had never dreamed amid the primitive retirement of Normandene. The works of Vasari and Winckelman, the *Æsthetic* papers of Frederick Von Schlegel, the art-inspired writings of Goëthe, awakened in me, one after the other, fresher and deeper revelations of beauty. I wandered through the galleries of the Louvre like one newly gifted with sight. I haunted the Venus of Milo, and the Diana *Chasseresse* like another Pygmalion. The more I admired, the more I found to admire. The more I comprehended, the more I found remained for me to comprehend. I recognised in art the sphynx whose

enigma is never solved. I learned for the first time the poetry that may be committed to imperishable marble, and steeped in unfading colours. By degrees, as I became imbued with the views of great thinkers, my insight grew keener, and my perceptions more exquisite. The symbolism of art evolved itself, as it were, from below the surface; and instead of beholding in paintings and sculptures mere outward forms of beauty, mere studies of positive reality, I came to know them at last as exponents of thought—as efforts after ideal truth—as aspirations which, because of their divineness, can never be wholly expressed, but which, from their very incompleteness, partake only the more touchingly, speak only the more eloquently, of the soul of the artist.

Like Goëthe, now, I gave myself up passionately to the cultivation of my taste for poetry and art. I filled my rooms with casts from the antique, and bought a couple of fine engravings, one of the Transfiguration, and the other of St. Peter the Martyr, which I hung up opposite the table at which I read and wrote. To apply myself to the study of medicine grew daily more difficult and more distasteful to me; and to look forward during the hours of work to the congenial labours of the quiet evening, when, with shaded lamp and curtained windows, I followed afar off the footsteps of poets and critics, became my single consolation and “exceeding great reward.”

Thus my life came gradually to assume new aspects, and my thoughts to flow into channels wider and deeper. Already I seemed to have expended the first effervescent folly of youth—already I had tried society, and finding it but the Dead Sea apple, fair without and rottenness within, had cast it away, as I believed for ever. That life which from boyhood I had ever looked upon as the happiest—the life of the student—was now mine, and could I but have devoted it utterly to the pursuits that I best loved, I would not have exchanged it for all the wealth of the Rothschilds. I had begun, in truth, to realise my actual

capabilities and inclinations. I had found the career for which I was best fitted. Somewhat indolent by nature, indifferent to achieve, and ambitious only to learn, I asked nothing better than a life given up to the worship of the beautiful, to books, to the acquisition of knowledge, and the development of taste. Would the time ever come where I might hope to realise this dream? Alas! who could tell? At present it seemed remote, almost impossible, but in the meantime—aye, in the meantime, here were books, museums, galleries, schools, golden opportunities, which once lost might never return, and which, while I could enjoy them, it were worse than idle to embitter by vain regrets, or vainer apprehensions.

So time went on, and giving up all else I plodded only by day in the Ecole de Medicine, but, when evening came, resumed my studies at the lamp turned down the night before, and like the visionary in the *Pilgrims of the Rhine*, took up my dream-life at the point where I had been awakened last.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE ENIGMA OF THE THIRD STOREY.

"Who ever lov'd, that lov'd not at first sight?"

MARLOWE.

IN Paris, a lodging-house (or, as they prefer to style it, a *hôtel meublé*) is a little town in itself—the nucleus of a colony—a beehive swarming from basement to attic—a miniature model of the great world beyond, with all its loves and hatreds, jealousies, aspirations, and struggles. Like that world, it contains several grades of society, but with this difference, that those who occupy the loftiest position therein are held in the lowest estimation. Thus, the sixth-floor lodgers turn up their noses at the inhabitants of the attics; while the sixth-floor is in its turn scorned by the fifth, and the fifth is despised by the fourth, and the fourth by the third, and the third by the second, down to the magnificent dwellers on the *premier étage*, who live in majestic disdain of everybody above or beneath them, from the grisettes in the garret, to the *concierge* who has the care of the cellars.

The house in which I lived in the Cité Bergere was, in fact, a double house, and contained no less than thirty responsible tenants, some of whom had wives, children, and servants. It consisted of seven floors, and each floor contained from eight to ten rooms. These were let in single apartments, or in suites, as the case might be, and on the outer doors opening round the landings were painted the names, or affixed the visiting cards, of the dwellers within. My own third-floor neighbours were four in number. To my left, in a suite of three or four rooms, lived a certain Monsieur and Madame Lemercier, a retired couple from Alsace. Opposite their door on the



other side of the well-staircase, dwelt one Monsieur Cliquot, an elderly *employé* in some public office. Next to him "wonned" one Signor Milanese, an Italian refugee, who played in the orchestra at the *Variétés* every night, was given to practising the violoncello by day, and wore as much hair about his face as a Skye terrier. Lastly, in the apartment to my right resided a lady upon whose door was nailed a small visiting card engraved with these words—

M<sup>LE</sup>. NAOMIE PREVOT

Teacher of Languages.

I had resided in the house for months before I ever beheld this Mademoiselle Naomi Prevôt. When I did at last encounter her upon the stairs, one wintry afternoon, she wore a thick, black veil, and, darting past me like a bird on the wing, disappeared down the staircase in fewer moments than I take to write of it. I scarcely observed her at the time. I had no more curiosity to learn whether the face under that veil was pretty or plain, than I cared to know whether the veil itself were Shetland or Chantilly. At that time Paris was yet new to me: Madame de Launay's evil influence was about me; and, occupied as my thoughts were with so many unprofitable matters, I took no heed of my fellow-lodgers. Nay, except when the groans of that much-tortured violoncello woke me in the morning to an unwelcome consciousness of the vicinity of Signor Milanese, I should scarcely have remembered that I was not the single and sole inhabitant of the third storey.

Now, however, that I spent all my evenings in my own quiet room, I became, unconsciously and by slow degrees, interested in the unseen inhabitant of the adjoining apartment. Sometimes, when the house was so still that the very turning of the page sounded unnaturally loud, and

the mere falling of a cinder startled me, I heard her in her chamber, singing softly to herself. Every night, I saw the light from her window streaming out over the balcony, and touching the evergreens with a midnight glow. Often and often, when it was so late that even I had given up study and gone to bed, I heard her reading aloud, or pacing to and fro to the measure of her own recitations. Listen as I would, I could only discover that these recitations were poetical fragments. A certain chanted metre, the chiming of an occasional rhyme, the rising and falling of a voice more than commonly melodious,—this was all that I ever succeeded in making out, though far enough from all I wished to know.

This vague interest was soon superseded by active curiosity. I resolved to question Madame Bouïsse, the *conciérge*, and as she, good soul! loved talking better than aught else in the world, it was not long before I found myself in possession of all that she knew herself—and that was provokingly little.

Mademoiselle Naomie, it appeared, was the enigma of the third storey. She had resided in the house for more than two years. She earned her living by her labour, went out teaching all the day, sat up at night, studying and writing, had no friends, received no visitors, was as industrious as a bee, and as proud as a princess. Books and flowers were her only friends, and her only luxuries. Poor as she was, she was continually filling her shelves with the former, and supplying her balcony with the latter. She lived frugally, drank no wine, was singularly silent and reserved, and “like a real lady,” said the fat *conciérge*, “paid her rent to the minute.” This, and no more, had Madame Bouïsse to tell. I had sought her in her own little retreat at the foot of the public staircase. It was a very wet afternoon, and, on pretext of drying my boots by the fire, I stayed to question, and to listen.

It was, like the sanctuary of every Parisian *conciérge*, an odd little apartment of confined atmosphere and hetero-

geneous uses, which, in the language of the popular Sartorian ballad, "served her for parlour, kitchen, and all." In one corner stood that famous article of furniture which became "a bed by night, a chest of drawers by day." Adjoining the bed was the fireplace; near the fireplace a corner cupboard filled with crockery, and surmounted by a grand ormolu clock, singularly at variance with the rest of the articles. A table, a warming-pan, and a couple of chairs, completed the furniture of the room, which, with all its contents, could scarcely have been more than eight feet square. On a shelf inside the door stood thirty flat candlesticks; and on a row of nails just beneath them, hung two and twenty bright, brass chamber-door keys—whereby, if you be an apt arithmetician, you may divine that exactly two and twenty lodgers were out in the rain, and only eight housed comfortably within doors.

"And how old should you suppose this lady to be?" I asked, resuming the conversation, and leaning idly against the table whereon Madame Bouïsse was preparing an unsavoury dish of veal and garlic.

The *conciérge* shrugged her ponderous shoulders.

"Ah, bah, M'sieur, I am no judge of age," said she.

"Well—is she pretty?"

"I am no judge of beauty, either," grinned Madame Bouïsse.

"But, my good lady," I expostulated, "you have eyes!"

"Yours are younger than mine, *mon enfant*," retorted the fat *conciérge*, "and, as I see Mam'selle Naomie coming up to the door, I'd advise you to make use of them for yourself!"

And there, sure enough, was a tall and slender girl, dressed all in black, pausing to close up her umbrella at the threshold of the outer doorway. A porter followed her, carrying a heavy parcel. Having deposited this in the passage, he touched his cap, and stated his charge. The young lady took out her purse, turned over the coins, shook her head, and finally came up to Madame's little sanctuary.

"Will you be so obliging, Madame Bouïsse," she said, "as to lend me a piece of ten sous. I have not one left in my purse."

She was not particularly beautiful; or, if so, her physical beauty was eclipsed and overborne by that "true beauty of the soul" which outshines all other, as the sun puts out the stars.

There was in her face—or, perhaps, rather in her expression, an indefinable something that came upon me almost like a memory. Had I seen that face in some forgotten dream of long ago? Brown-haired was she, and pale, with a brow "as chaste as ice, as pure as snow," and eyes—

"In whose orb a shadow lies,  
Like the dusk in evening skies!"

Eyes lit from within, large, clear, lustrous, with a meaning in them so profound and serious that it was almost sorrowful,—like the eyes of Giotto's saints in the old Florentine churches.

But I cannot describe her—

"For oh, her looks had something excellent  
That wants a name!"

I can only look back upon her with "my mind's eye," and gaze at her as I then stood and gazed—silent in admiration.

Madame Bouïsse, meanwhile, searched in all the corners of her ample pockets, turned out her table-drawer, dived into the recesses of her husband's empty garments, and peeped into every ornament upon the chimney-piece; but in vain. There was no such thing as a ten-sous piece to be found.

"Pray M'sieur Leigh," said she, "have you one?"

"One what?" I ejaculated, startled out of my reverie.

"Why, a ten-sous piece, to be sure. Don't you see that Mam'selle Naomie is waiting in her wet shoes, and that I have been hunting for the last five minutes and can't find one anywhere?"

Blushing like a schoolboy, and stammering some unintelligible excuses, I took out a handful of francs and half-francs, and supplied the desired coin immediately, to the young lady's ill-concealed surprise, and Madame Bouïsse's undisguised amusement.

"*Dame!*" said she, "this comes of using one's eyes too well, my young M'sieur! Hem! I'm not so blind but that I can see as far as my neighbours."

Fortunately, Mademoiselle Naomie had gone back to settle with the porter, and so this observation passed unheard. The man dismissed, she came back, carrying the parcel, and took down her key. The load was weighty, and she was obliged to lay it on the nearest chair.

"After all, Madame Bouïsse," said she, "I must ask your help. I fear I am not strong enough to carry it upstairs."

More alert this time, I stepped forward, and bowing respectfully, said—

"Will Mademoiselle suffer me to be the bearer? I am now going upstairs."

The young lady hesitated. "Monsieur is very polite," she said, reluctantly; "but——"

"But Madame Bouïsse is occupied," I urged. "I only ask to be her substitute."

The fat *conciérge* nodded good-humouredly, and patted me on my shoulder.

"Let him carry the parcel, Mam'selle Naomie," she chuckled. "Let him carry it. M'sieur is your neighbour, and neighbours should be neighbourly. Besides," she added in an audible aside, "he is a *bon garçon*—an Englishman—and a book-student, like yourself."

The young lady inclined her head politely, but proudly. Compelled, as it were, to accept my services, she seemed desirous of showing me that I must, nevertheless, expect no farther intercourse—not even on the plea of neighbourhood. I understood her, took up the parcel, and without another syllable, preceded her to her door on the third storey. Here she paused and thanked me.

"Will you not permit me," I said, "to carry it in for you?"

Again she hesitated; but only for an instant. Too well-bred not to see that a refusal would now be a discourtesy, she unlocked the door, and held it open that I might pass in.

The first room was an ante-chamber; the second a *salon*, somewhat larger than my own, with a door to the right, leading into what I judged should be her bedroom. At a glance, I took in all the details of her house. There was her writing-table, laden with books and papers, her desk, and her pile of manuscripts. At one end of the room stood a piano, serving the uses of a sideboard, and looking as if it were seldom, if ever, opened. Some water-colour drawings were suspended round the walls, and a well-filled book-case stood in a recess beside the fire-place. Nothing escaped me—not even the shaded reading-lamp, nor the plain ebony time-piece, nor the bronze Apollo on the bracket above the piano, nor the sword over the mantel-piece, which told as so strange an ornament in the study of a gentle lady. Besides all this, there were books everywhere, heaped upon the tables, ranged on shelves, piled in corners, and scattered hither and thither in "most admired disorder." It was, however, the only disorder there. All else showed a neatness most discreet and womanly.

I had no pretence to linger. Having deposited the parcel on the nearest table, there was nothing left for me but to take my leave. Mademoiselle Prevôt held the door open for me.

"Accept my best thanks, sir," she said in English, with a pretty foreign accent that made the dear old tongue sound all the pleasanter.

"I would, Mademoiselle," I replied, "that you thanked me for a worthier service."

She smiled again—proudly still, but very sweetly—and the door closed upon me.

I went back to my room; it seemed dark and desolate.

I applied myself to study ; but all subjects seemed alike tedious. I could fix my attention upon nothing, and so wandered out among the dusky streets till the evening was fairly set in, and the human tide flowed slower. The chastened lamp-light streamed from her window when I returned, nor faded thence till two hours after midnight. I watched it from time to time all the long evening, stealing out into my balcony which adjoined her own, and welcoming the cool night air upon my brow ; for I was restless and disquieted, I knew not why, and my heart was stirred within me, strangely and sweetly.

And this was my first interview with Naomie Prevôt. Not an incident of it has since glided from my memory, nor could ever do so though I were to live for a thousand years to come ! In that brief meeting I was already fascinated and bewildered. I had fallen in love at first sight—yes, in love ; for love it was—real, passionate, earnest love, destined to be the sunshine of my youth, the master-passion of my later life !

\* \* \* \* \*

“ Humph ! love at first sight,” objects my incredulous and matter-of-fact friend at the other side of the fireplace. “ What folly ! ”

And why not love at first sight, thou sceptic ? Is not Dan Cupid a capricious deity, much dependant upon impulse, and little given to reflection ? We have all fallen in love with places at first sight ; why not, then, with people ? Did you yourself, O, Paterfamilias, never choose a book for its binding, nor drop into the pit, because you “ fancied ” the name of the play ?

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A CHRONICLE ABOUT FROISSART.

"See, Lucius, here's the book I sought for so!"

JULIUS CÆSAR.

"But all be that he was a philosophre,  
Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre,  
But all that he might of his frendes,  
On bokes and on lerning he it spent."

CHAUCEK.

"LOVE-IN-IDLENESS" has passed into a proverb, and lovers, somehow or another, are not generally supposed to be industrious. I, however, worked none the less heartily in consequence of the events last related. I believe, on the contrary, that I applied only the more closely to my studies, both medical and literary, and made better progress in both than I had made before. Without being genuinely ambitious, I had many incentives to work. I was anxious to satisfy my father, and to do justice to the education of which he had laid the foundation. I earnestly desired to efface every unfavourable impression from the mind of Dr. Lucet, and to gain, if possible, his esteem. I was proud of the friendship of Madame d'Argenteuil, and wished to prove the value that I placed upon her opinion. Above all, I had a true and passionate love of learning—not that love which leadeth to fame, but rather that self-abandoning devotion which exchangeth willingly the world of action for the world of books, and for an uninterrupted communion with the "souls of all that men held wise," bartereth away the society of the living. Little gregarious by nature, Paris had already ceased to delight me in the manner that it had delighted me at first. A "retired leisure," and the society of the woman whom I



loved, grew to be the day-dream of my solitary life; and still ever more and more plainly it grew evident to me that for the career of the student I was designed by nature. Bayle, Magliabecchi of Florence, Isaac Reed, Sir Thomas Brown, Montaigne—those were the men whose lots in life I envied—those the literary anchorites in whose steps I would fain have followed.

But this was not to be; so I worked bravely on, rose early, studied late, gained experience, took out my second inscription with credit, and had the satisfaction of knowing that I was fast acquiring the good opinion of Dr. Lucet. Thus Christmas passed by, and January, with its bitter winds, and February set in, bright but frosty; and still, without encouragement or hope, I went on loving Naomie Prévôt.

My opportunities of seeing her were few and brief. A passing bow in the hall, or a distant "good evening," as we passed upon the stairs, for some time made up the sum of our intercourse. Gradually a kind of formal acquaintanceship sprang up between us, fostered by trifles, and dependent on the idlest, or what seemed the idlest, casualties. I say "seemed," for often that which to her appeared the work of chance was the result of long conniving on my part. She little knew, when I met her on the staircase, how I had been listening for the last hour to catch the echo of her step. She little dreamed, when I encountered her at the corner of the street, how I had been concealed, till that moment, in the *café* over the way, ready to dart out as soon as she appeared in sight. I would then affect either a polite unconcern, or an air of judicious surprise, or pretend not to lift my eyes at all till she was nearly past; and I think I must have been a very fair actor, for it all succeeded capitally, and I am not aware that she ever had the least suspicion of the truth. Let me, however, recall one genuine incident, over which I had no control, and which did more towards improving our acquaintance than all the rest.

It is a cold, bright morning in February. There is a

brisk exhilaration in the air. The windows and gilded balconies sparkle in the sun, and it is pleasant to hear the frosty reverberation of one's boots upon the pavement. It is a fête to-day. Nothing is doing in the lecture-rooms, and I have the whole day before me, to enjoy as I please. Meaning, therefore, to enjoy it over the fire, and a book, I wisely begin it by a walk.

From the Cité Bergère, out along the right-hand side of the Boulevards, down past the front of the Madeleine, across the Place de la Concorde, and up the Champs Elysées, as far as the Arch of Triumph, is the route I take in going. Arrived at the arch, I cross over, and come back by the same roads, but on the contrary side of the pavement. I have had a motive in this. There is a certain second-hand book-shop on the right-hand of the Boulevard des Italiens, which draws me by a fabulous and wholly irresistible attraction. Had I started on that side, I should have gone no farther. I should have looked, lingered, purchased, and gone home to read. But I know my weakness. I have reserved the book-shop for my return journey, and now, rewarded and triumphant, compose myself for a quiet study of its treasures.

And what a book-shop it is!—not only are its windows filled—not only are its walls a very perspective of learning, but there are square pillars of volumes built upon either side of the door, and an immense supplementary library erected in the open air, down all the length of a dead wall adjoining the house!

Here, then, I pause, turning over the leaves of one volume, reading the title of another, studying the personal appearance of a third, and weighing the merits of their authors against the contents of my purse. And when I say "personal appearance," I say it advisedly; for book-hunters are skilled Lavaters, in their way, and books, like men, have their differences of physiognomy, which attract or repel without reference to their contents. Thus it happens that I love a portly book in a sober coat of

calf, but hate a thin smart volume, in a gaudy binding. The one may err on the side of dryness, but is oftener philosophic, learnedly witty, or solidly instructive; the other is tolerably certain to be pert and shallow, and reminds me of a coxcombical lacquey in bullion and red plush. On the same principle, I respect leaves soiled and dog's-eared, but distrust gilt edges; love an old volume better than a new; prefer a spacious book-stall to all the unpurchased stores of Paternoster Row; and buy every book that I possess at second-hand. Nay, that it is second-hand is in itself a passport to my favour. Somebody has read it before; therefore it is readable. Somebody has derived pleasure from it before; therefore, I open it with a student's sympathy, and am disposed to be indulgent ere I have perused a single line. There are cases, however, in which I incline, if not to absolute newness, at least to luxury of binding. Just as I had rather have my historians in old calf, and my chronicles in black letter, so do I delight to see my modern poets, the Benjamins of my affections, clothed in coats of many colours. For them, no moroccos are too rich, and no "tooling" too elaborate. I love to see them smiling on me from the shelves of my bookcases, as glowing and varied as the sun-set through a painted oriel.

Standing here, then, to-day, and dipping first into this work and then, into that, I behold a very curious and interesting edition of *Froissart*—an edition full of quaint engravings, and printed in the obsolete spelling of two hundred years ago. The book was a treasure, and a bargain, being marked up at only five and twenty francs. Those alone who haunt book-stalls and luxuriate in old editions appreciate the satisfaction with which I survey

" That weight of wood, with leathern coat o'erlaid,  
Those ample clasps of solid metal made,  
The close press'd leaves unclosed for many an age,  
The dull red edging of the well-filled page,  
And the broad back, with stubborn ridges roll'd,  
Where yet the title stands in tarnished gold ! "

They only can sympathise in the eagerness with which I snatch up the precious volume, the haste with which I count out the five and twenty francs, the delight with which I see the dealer's hand close on the sum, and know that the book is legally and indisputably mine! Then, how lovingly I embrace it under my arm, and, taking advantage of my position as a purchaser, stroll leisurely round the inner warehouse, still courting that literary world which (in a library, at least) always turns its back upon its worshipper!

"Pray, Monseieur," says a voice at the door, "where is that old *Froissart* that I saw outside about a quarter of an hour ago?"

"Just sold, Madame," replies the bookseller, promptly.

"Oh, how unfortunate! and I only went home for the money!" exclaims the lady in a tone of real disappointment.

Selfishly exultant, I hug the book more closely than ever, turn to steal a glance at my defeated rival, and recognise—Naomie!

She does not see me. I stand in the inner gloom of the shop, and she is already turning away. I follow her at a little distance, keep her in sight all the way home, let her go into the house some few seconds in advance, and then, scaling three stairs at a time, overtake her at the door of her apartment.

Flushed and breathless, I stand beside her, with *Froissart* in my hand.

"Mademoiselle," I say, hurriedly, "pardon me for having involuntarily forestalled you just now. I was the purchaser of the book you wished to buy."

"Indeed, Monsieur!" she observes with cold surprise.

"And I rejoice to have this opportunity of repairing my error."

Mademoiselle Prevôt makes a gesture of refusal.

"I congratulate you on your purchase, sir," she replies, politely, but I cannot allow you to relinquish it in my favour."

"But, Mademoiselle, unless you do condescend to allow it, I beg to assure you that I shall take the book back to the bookseller and exchange it for some other."

"Why so?"

"That you may be enabled still to become the purchaser."

"And yet," she urges, smiling faintly, "you wished for the book, or you would not have bought it."

"I wish for nothing which might be useful or valuable to—to a lady."

"Then, really, sir," returns Mademoiselle Prevôt, with that same smile, half furtive, half disdainful, still playing about her lips, "it is time that you should learn to be less generous. I desire to profit by none of these so-called privileges of my sex, which are, in truth, but concessions from yours. Had I first bought the book, I should have kept it—being a woman. Reverse the case as you will, and show me any sensible reason why you should not do the same—being a man?"

"Well, madam," I begin, "the laws of courtesy——"

"Like many other laws, need considerable amendment," retorts the lady.

"But, madam, would you then banish our old traditions of the age of chivalry—reduce to prose the last lingering echoes of that poetry which blessed the arms of the Crusaders, and animated the sonnets of the Trouvères?"

"Yes—by creating a nobler poetry in its place."

"But not by banishing courtesy?"

"No, sir; by reforming its abuses. Is there not a kind of praise, which, rightly interpreted, is blame? A liberty, which is bondage? A refinement, which is vulgarity? And may there not also be courtesies which are, in fact, only concessions; or compliments even more humiliating than offences?"

"Upon my word, madam," I falter, "your language is so new to me that—that I confess I am unable to follow your arguments."

Mademoiselle Prevôt unlocks her door, and, turning towards me with the same air of raillery, says—

“Monsieur, it is recorded in your histories, and ours, that when John le Bon was taken captive after the battle of Cressy, the Black Prince rode bareheaded before him through the streets of London, and served him at table as the humblest of his attendants. But, for all that, monsieur, was John the less a prisoner, or the Prince a conqueror?”

“I understand you now, mademoiselle. You will accept no courtesy based on such idle forms. Suffer me, then, to clothe my request in fairer language, and believe that I would have done so from the first had I dared to speak the simple truth.”

“And that is——?”

“That it will give me more pleasure to resign the book to you than I could ever experience in the possession of it for myself.”

Mademoiselle Prevôt colours up, looks both haughty and amused, and ends by laughing—

“Upon my word, sir,” she says merrily, “if your politeness were at first too general, it now becomes almost too particular.”

“Rather say, mademoiselle, that you will not take the book on any terms!” I exclaim, impatiently.

“Because you have not yet offered it to me on any that are just and reasonable!”

“Well then, madam, bluntly and frankly, as student to student, I beg you to spare me the trouble of carrying back this *Froissart* to the Boulevard. Yours was the first intention. You saw the book full a quarter of an hour before me. You would have taken it at once, but were forced to go home for the money! In common equity, it is yours—in common civility, as student to student, I offer it to you again. Say, is it yes or no?”

“Since it seems that I must yield to your insistence, sir,” replies Madlle. Prevôt, drawing out her purse, “and

since you place it upon grounds, which, if not strictly legal, are, at all events, dictated by honour and good feeling, I suppose I must say—yes.”

And with this she takes the book, and offers me, in return, the five and twenty francs.

Pained at having to accept them, seeing no possibility of refusing them, and feeling altogether more distress than was reasonable in a man brought up to the reception of fees, I affect not to see this gesture, and, bowing, move away to my door.

“*Pardon, monsieur,*” she says, following me; “but you forget I am in your debt.”

“In my debt, madam!”

“Yes—five and twenty francs.”

“And—and do you really compel me to—to——”

She looks up, surprised and offended.

“Monsieur, if you do not take the money, I cannot take the book.”

Sooner than wound her pride, I subdue my own, extend my hand for the coins, and open my own door. Still she lingers.

“I—I have not thanked you as I ought for your generosity,” she begins, hesitatingly.

“Generosity!” I repeat, glancing down with some bitterness upon the five and twenty francs.

“True kindness, sir, is neither bought nor sold,” says the lady, with the loveliest smile in the world; and closes her door.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE OLD, OLD STORY.

"What thing is Love, which nought can countervail?  
Nought save itself, even such a thing is Love?"

SIR W. RALEIGH.

My acquaintance with Naomie Prévôt progressed as slowly as ever, and not even the Froissart adventure went far to promote it. Absorbed in her studies; living for the intellect alone; too proud to be social, and too independent to listen to even the sweet, natural promptings of her woman's heart, I found her the most inaccessible of God's creatures. And yet, perhaps because she was so indifferent to me, because she was so lofty, so pure, so passionless, I loved her the more! Her pale, proud face haunted me. I dwelt upon the picture of her solitary life till the remembrance of how I made no part of that life grew almost too bitter for endurance. I thought of her, sometimes, till it seemed impossible that she should not be conscious of how my very soul was centred upon her.

And this was love—real, passionate, and earnest—the first love of my heart! Did I believe that I had ever loved before? Ah, no! I felt it now in its true strength, beheld it in its true beauty. Was I not blind till I had looked into her eyes? Was I not deaf till I had heard her voice? Had I ever lived, or breathed, or known delight till now? I never paused to ask myself how this would end. The mere act of loving was in itself too sweet for questioning. What cared I for the uncertainties of the future, having hope and youth to sustain and stimulate my passion? Was not my whole being gathered into the present, and was it not enough—

"To feed for aye my lamp and flames of love,"  
and worship her, till love became a religion and a rite?



And now, how I longed to achieve something, no matter what or how, which should exact, if not her love, at least her admiration. I wished I were a soldier, that I might fight for her; or a poet, that I might write verses in her praise, which should be deathless; or a painter, that I might spend my life copying the dear perfection of her face? Ah, and I would copy it so that all the world should be in love with it also! Not a wave of her brown hair that I would not patiently follow through all its windings! not the tender tracery of a blue vein that I would not lovingly render through its veil of transparent skin! not a depth of her dark eyes that I would not study,

“Deep-drinking of the infinite,”

till my very soul failed within me, for love and longing! Alas those eyes, so grave, so luminous, so steadfast,—

“Eyes not down-dropt, not over-bright, but fed  
With the clear-pointed flame of chastity,”

—eyes wherein “thought folded over thought” appeared to lie, and truth, as from the bottom of her own clear well, looked out unfearing;—what painter need ever hope to copy them?

Yet she never guessed how dear she had become to me. She never knew how the very air seemed purer because she dwelt in it and made it exquisite. She never dreamed how I watched the light from her window night after night—how I listened to every murmur in her chamber—how I watched and waited for the merest glimpse of her as she passed by—how her lightest glance hurried the pulses through my heart—how her coldest word was treasured up in the cabinets of my memory—how I worshipped, how I sought, how I honoured her! What cared she, though to her I had dedicated all the “book and volume of my brain,” hallowed its every page with blazonings of her name, and illuminated it, for love of her, with fair thoughts, and images, and forms of saints and angels,

---

“Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,  
As are the tiger-moth's deep damask'd wings?”

Her hand never was outstretched to open its golden clasps; her eye never deigned to rest upon its records. To her I was nothing, or less than nothing—a neighbour, a stranger, a fellow-lodger, a fellow-student—not even a friend—not even an acquaintance!

And yet I loved her with a love that, day after day, struck its roots down deeper and stronger into my very heart of hearts, never again to be dislodged, unless with life itself!

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### ON A WINTER'S EVENING.

AFTER a winter more than usually severe, the early spring came crowned with rime instead of primroses. Paris was intensely cold. In March the Seine was still frozen, and the snow lay thickly on the housetops. Quiet at all times, the little room in which I lived, became monastically still, and at night, when the great gates were closed, and the footsteps of the passers-by were dulled by the snow carpet below, you might have heard a whisper from one side of the street to the other. Indescribably delicious was this silent solitude in the heart of a great, gay, feverish city.

Sitting beside the fire one evening, enjoying the profound calm of the place, attending from time to time to my little coffee-pot on the hob, and slowly turning the pages of a favourite author, I luxuriate in a state of mind half idle, half studious. Leaving off presently, to listen to some sound which I hear, or fancy I hear, in the adjoining room, I wonder, for the twentieth time, whether Naomie can have yet returned from her long day's teaching, and so rise, open my window noiselessly and look out. Yes, the light is streaming forth like the glow from my own chamber, across the snow-laden balcony. Heigho! it is something even to know that she is there, so near me—divided only by a thin partition! Trying to comfort myself with this thought, I close the window again, and return to my book, somewhat more restless and absent than before. Sitting thus, with the unturned leaf lingering between my thumb and forefinger, I hear a rapid footfall on the stairs, and a

musical whistle, which, growing louder as it approaches, breaks off at my door, and is followed by a lively imitation of a bugle-call and a prolonged assault and battery on the outer panels.

"What, Herr Müller!" I exclaim, as I admit him. "You are indeed a stranger!"

"No thanks to you, Signor Bookworm, if I do not literally become one," replies he cheerily. "Why, man, 'tis three months and more since we have met. The Quartier Latin is aggrieved by your neglect, and the fine arts over the water languish and are forlorn!"

Saying this, he shakes the snow from his cloak, perches his cap on the head of a plastic Niobe adorning my chimney-piece, and lays aside the folio which he had been carrying under his arm. In the meantime, I have wheeled an easy-chair to the fire, brought out a bottle of Chambertin, and piled on fresh logs, in honour of my guest.

"You cannot think," said I, shaking him by the hand for the second time, "how heartily glad I am that you have come! It does me good to see your friendly face, and I have been so solitary of late, that—that upon my word, I was getting even more dull than Dame Nature had made me!"

"*Ma foi!* I don't wonder at it," replied he, "if these old busts are all the society you keep! *Sacre nom d'un pipe!* can a fellow keep up his conviviality in the continual contemplation of Niobe and Jupiter Tonens? What do you mean by it? Have you turned hermit, and are you growing a beard? Shall I raise a subscription to present you with a skull and an hour-glass?"

"Not yet, thank you; my own skull for the present contents me. Take some wine."

Müller filled his glass, tasted with the air of a *connoisseur*, and nodded approvingly.

"Chambertin, by the god Bacchus!" said he. "Napoleon's favourite wine, and mine—evidence of the sympathy that exists between the truly great."

And, draining the glass, he burst into a song in praise of French wines, beginning—

“ Le Chambertin rend joyeux,  
 Le Nuits rend infatigable,  
 Le Volnay rend amoureux,  
 Le Champagne rend amiable.  
 Girsons-nous, mes chers amis,  
 L'ivresse  
 Vaut la richesse ;  
 Pour moi, des que je suis gris,  
 Jè possède tout Paris !”

“ Oh hush !” said I, uneasily ; “ not so loud, pray !”

“ Why not ?”

“ The—the neighbours, you know. We cannot do as we would in the Quartier Latin.”

“ Nonsense, my dear fellow, you don't swear yourself to silence when you take apartments in a *hôtel meublé* ! You might as well live in a penitentiary!—

De bouchous faisons un tas,  
 Et s'il faut avoir la zoutte,  
 Aumoins que ce ne soit pas  
 Pour n'avoir bu qu' une goutte !”

“ Nay, I implore you !” I interposed again. “ The landlord—”

“ Hang the landlord !

“ Grisons-nous.—”

“ Well, but—but there is a lady in the next room—”

Müller laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

“ *Allons donc !*” said he, “ why not have told me so at first ? Oh, you sly rogue ! you *gaillard* ! This is your love of learning, is it ? This the secret of your researches upon art ! What art, pray ? Ovid's Art of Love, I'll be sworn !”

“ You may laugh at me as much as you please, Herr Müller,” I said, feeling my face and my temper growing hot in spite of me, “ but that lady, who is an entire stranger to me——”

“ Oh—oh,—oh !” cried the student.

“ Yes, who is a stranger to me—I repeat it—and who, following a profession which employs her all the day, gives her evening to study——”

Müller laid his hand upon my sleeve.

"Enough enough," he interrupted, smiling good-naturedly "You are right, and I will be as dumb as Plato. What is the lady's name?"

"Prévôt," I answered, somewhat reluctantly. "Madoiselle Prévôt."

"Aye, but her Christian name?"

"Her Christian name?" I faltered, more reluctant still "I—I——"

"Don't say you don't know," said Müller, maliciously. "It isn't worth while. After all, what does it matter? Here's to her health, all the same—à *vosre sante*, Madoiselle Prévôt! What! not drink her health, though I have filled your glass on purpose?"

There was no help for it, so I took the glass, and drank the toast with the best grace I could.

"And now, tell me," continued my companion, drawing nearer to the fire, and settling himself with a confidential air that was peculiarly provoking, "what is she like? Young or old? dark or fair? plain or pretty?"

"Old," said I desperately. "Old and ugly. Fifty at the least. Squints horribly."

Then, thinking that I had been a little too emphatic, I added—

"But a very ladylike person, and exceedingly well-informed."

Müller looked at me gravely, and filled his glass again.

"I think I know the lady," said he.

"Indeed?"

"Yes—by your description. You forgot to add, however, that she is grey."

"To be sure—as a badger."

"To say nothing of a club-foot, an impediment in her speech, a voice like a raven's, and a hump like a dromedary's! Ah, my dear friend, what an amazingly comic fellow you are!"

And the student burst again into a peal of merriment

so irrepressible and so infectious, that, although I did not very clearly see in what respect I had been so unusually amusing, I could not have helped laughing also, if it had been to save my life.

"And now," said he, when we had both done, "to the immediate object of my visit. Do you remember asking me to make you a copy of an old portrait at that tumble-down chateau near Montlhery?"

"To be sure I do, and have been intending to write to you about it time out of mind! Did you ever take the trouble to go down and look at it?"

"Look at it, indeed! I should rather think so. What does your connoisseurship say to this?"

Say to it!—good heavens! what could I say? what could I do, but flush up all suddenly with pleasure, and wonder, and surprise, and hang over it breathlessly, and, struggling to preserve my self-command, press my hand, unseen above the beatings of my heart? For it was like her—oh, so like her, that it might almost have been her portrait! The features, perhaps, were not quite the same. The brow was a little less lofty—the smile a little less cold—the attitude expressive of more tenderness and gentleness than would seem to be characteristic of Naomie's disposition; but the eyes, the beautiful, lustrous, soul-lighted eyes, were the very same!

If she were to wear an old-fashioned dress, and deck her fair neck and arms with pearls, and stand, just so, with her hand upon one of the old stone urns in the gardens of that deserted chateau, she would be so like it that no portrait could resemble her more nearly! Well might I think that I had seen her face in some dream of long ago!

And this picture was mine! Mine, to hang up before my desk when I was working—mine to place at my bed's foot, where I could see it on first waking—mine to adore, to weave fancies and build hopes upon, and "burn out the day in idle phantasies" of passionate devotion!

"Well," said Müller, impatiently, "what do you think of it?"

I started, and looked up, like one dreaming.

"Think of it!" I repeated.

"Yes—do you think it like?"

"So like that it might have been her por—I mean, that I might have taken it for the original!"

"Oh, that is satisfactory," said the painter. "I was afraid you were disappointed in it; you were so silent at first. One always misses the tone of age in these things, you know, however faithful may be the copy."

"I would not have it look a day older!" I exclaimed, never lifting my eyes from the canvas.

Müller came and looked down at it over my shoulder.

"It is an interesting head," said he. "I have a great mind to introduce it into my next year's competition picture."

I laid down the portrait as suddenly as if he had struck me. The very thought was sacrilege!

"For God's sake, do no such thing!" I ejaculated.

"Why not?" said he, opening his eyes in astonishment.

"I—I cannot tell you why—at least not yet; but to—to confer a very particular obligation upon me, will you waive this point?"

Müller rubbed his head all over with both hands, and sat down in the utmost perplexity.

"Upon my soul and conscience!" said he, "you are the most incomprehensible fellow that I ever met with in my life!"

"I am. I grant it—what then? Let us see, I am to give you a hundred and fifty francs for this copy——"

"I won't take it," said Müller. "I mean you to accept it as a pledge of friendship and good will."

"Nay—I insist on paying for it—I shall be proud to pay for it; but a hundred francs is not enough. Let me give you a cheque for three hundred, and promise me that you will not put the head into your picture!"



Müller laughed, and shook his own head resolutely. "I will give you both the portrait and the promise," said he; "but I won't take your money, if I know it."

"But——"

"But I won't—and so, if you don't like me well enough to accept such a trifle from me, I'll e'en carry the thing home again!"

And, snatching up his cap and cloak, he made a feint of putting the portrait back into the folio.

"Not for the world!" I exclaimed, taking affectionate possession of it, without further remonstrance. "I would sooner part from all else that I possess. How can I ever thank you enough?"

"By never thanking me at all! What little time the thing has cost me, has been overpaid, not only by the sight of your pleasure, but my own satisfaction in copying it. To copy a good work is to have a lesson from the painter, though he were dead a hundred years before; and the man who painted that portrait, be he whom he might, has taught me a trick or two that I never knew before. *Sapriste!* see if I don't dazzle you some day with an effect of white satin and pearls against a fair, white skin!"

"An ingenious argument," I replied, shaking him by the hand warmly; "but it fails to persuade me that I am not the gainer by this transaction. Won't you stay and drink another bottle of Chambertin with me? It is yet quite early."

"Impossible! I have promised to meet a couple of men up at the Prado, and have, besides, invited them afterwards to supper."

"What is the Prado?"

"The Prado! why, what a Corydon you must be, not to know it? The Prado is one of the jolliest places in in all the Quartier Latin—it's close to the Palais de Justice. You can dance there, or practise pistol-shooting, or play billiards, or sap—or anything you please. Everybody smokes there—ladies included."

"How very delightful!"

"Oh, magnificent! Will you come with me? I know a dozen pretty girls who will be delighted to be introduced to you?"

"Not to-night, thank you," said I, laughing.

"Well, another time?"

"Yes, to be sure—and other time."

"Well, good night."

"Good night, and thank you again, a thousand times over."

But he would not stay to hear me thank him, and was half way down the first flight before my sentence was finished. Just as I was going back into my room, and about to close the door, he called after me from the landing.

"*Hola, Amigo!*" cried he. "When my picture is done, I mean to give a bachelor's supper-party—chiefly students and *Chicards*. Will you come?"

"Gladly!"

"Adieu, then. I will let you know in time!"

And with this, he broke out into a fragment of Beranger, gave a cheerful good night to Madame Bouïsse in the hall, and was gone.

And now to enjoy my picture! Now to lock the door, and trim the lamp, and place it up against a pile of books, and sit down before it in silent rapture, like a devotee before the portrait of his patron saint! Now I can gaze, unreprieved, into those eyes, and fancy they are hers! Now I can, by just bending, press my lips upon that exquisite mouth, and believe it warm! Ah, will her eyes ever look, with that expression, into mine? Will her lips ever suffer mine to come so near? Would she, if she knew the treasure I possessed, be displeased that it was mine, and that I so worshipped it?

Hanging over it thus, and suffering my thoughts to stray on at their own will and pleasure, I am startled all at once by the fall of some heavy object in the adjoining chamber!

The fall is followed by a stifled cry, and then all is again silent.

To unlock my door, and rush to hers—to try vainly to open it—to cry “Naomie! Naomie! what has happened? In heaven’s name what has happened?” is the work of but an instant.

The antechamber lay between, and I remembered that she could not hear me. I ran back, knocked against the wall, and repeated—

“What has happened? Oh tell me what has happened!”

Again I listened, and in that interval of suspense heard her garments rustle along the ground, then a deep sigh, and then the words—

“Nothing serious. I have hurt my hand.”

“Open the door, then, that I may see what can be done to help you.”

There was another long silence.

“I cannot,” she said, at length, but more faintly.

“In God’s name, try!”

No answer.

“Shall I get over the balcony?”

I waited another instant, heard nothing, and then, without farther hesitation, opened my own window, and climbed the iron rail that separated her portion of the balcony from mine, leaving my footsteps trampled in the snow.

I found her sitting upon the floor with her body bent forward, and her head resting against the corner of a fallen bookcase. The scattered volumes lay all about. A half-filled portmanteau stood close by on a chair. A travelling cloak and a passport-case lay on the table.

Seeing, yet scarcely noting all this, I flung myself on my knees beside her, and found that one hand and arm lay beneath the bookcase. She was not insensible, but pain had deprived her of the power of speech. I raised her head tenderly, and supported it against a chair, then lifted the heavy bookcase, and, one by one, removed the volumes that had fallen upon her.

Alas! the white hand crushed and bleeding! Alas! the powerless arm! Alas! the brave mouth striving to be firm, while heavy drops of agony forced their way between the quivering lids!

I took the poor, maimed arm and laid it over my shoulder, raised her as if she had been an infant, and carried her to the sofa.

Then I closed the window; went back to my own room for warm water, and such simple remedies, tore up a couple of handkerchiefs for bandages; adapted an old cravat for a sling, and so dressed and bound her wounds; blessing, for the first time in my life, the fate that had made me a surgeon!

From the time that I had entered the room up to the moment when all was completed, she never spoke, but lay pale and silent, with lips resolutely closed against any impulse of weakness; not a moan, not a start, betrayed her suffering; only, when it was over, she heaved a deep sigh, and said——

“I thank you, sir.”

“Are you in much pain?” I asked, bending fondly over her.

“Not much now, but I feel very faint.”

I remembered my coffee, and brought it to her. I encircled her with my arm, and supported her while she drank it, and had the joy of seeing the colour return to her lips, and the rigid lines fade from her brow.

“You are much better now,” I said, when she had again lain down. “Tell me how it happened.”

She smiled languidly.

“It was not my fault,” she said, “but Froissart’s. Do you remember that Froissart?”

Remember it! I should think so.

“Froissart!” I exclaimed. “Why, what had he to do with it?”

“Only this. I usually kept him on the top of the bookcase that fell down this evening. Just now, while pre-

paring for a journey upon which I must start to-morrow, I thought to remove him to a safer place, for it is a book that I value. Instead of mounting on a chair, I tried to reach up, and so, I suppose, disturbed the equilibrium of the whole affair. It fell over, threw me down, imprisoned the hand and arm which I instinctively raised to save my head, and—and you know the rest.”

“Merciful heaven! it might have killed you!”

“To be sure it might. That was what I thought, as I felt it falling.”

It went to my heart to see her lying there, so pale and placid. I could have died only to press my lips upon her brow—but would have died sooner than dare it!

“You spoke of a journey,” I said, averting my face, lest she should read its tale too plainly; “but you are, of course, aware that you cannot exert yourself for many days to come.”

“I must travel to-morrow,” said Naomie, resolutely.

“Impossible!”

“But imperative.”

“Think of the imprudence—the suffering—the danger—.”

“Imprudent it may be,” interrupted Mademoiselle Prévôt, with a touch of impatience in her voice;—“dangerous it cannot be; and as for the suffering, that concerns myself alone. There are keener pains than those of the body, and the consciousness of duty unfulfilled is one of them. You urge in vain. I must go; and now since it is time you bade me good night, allow me to thank you sincerely for your prompt assistance.”

“But can I do nothing else before I leave you?” I asked, with a sigh.

“Nothing—unless you will have the goodness to ask Madame Bouisse to step upstairs, and assist me into bed. I must also request her to finish packing my portmanteau for me.”

“At what hour do you start?”

“At nine.”

"May I accompany you as far as the coach-office, or railway station, and see that you get a comfortable seat?"

"I thank you," replied Naomie, very decisively; "but my place is already taken, and the husband of Madame Bouïsse will go with me, to carry my luggage."

Silenced, and perhaps, somewhat hurt, I rose, bowed, and turned away.

"I wish you a safe journey, mademoiselle," I said, "and safe return."

"And think me, at the same time, an ungrateful patient," added Mademoiselle Prévôt, faintly smiling.

"I did not say that."

"No; but you thought it; after all, it is possible that I deserve it. I am by nature undemonstrative. I am unused to the amenities of life. I—in short, I am only half-civilised, and you must forgive me!"

"Mademoiselle," I said, more moved than the occasion justified, "your apologies pain me, and are needless. Although a stranger, I believe that I comprehend you perfectly."

And with this I had almost left the room, but paused upon the threshold.

"Shall you—shall you be long away?" I faltered.

"How can I tell?" she answered dreamily. Then, correcting herself, "Oh, not long," she added. "Not long. Perhaps a fortnight—perhaps a week."

"Once more, then, good evening."

"Good evening," she replied, absently, and I withdrew.

Withdrew, but not to sleep. I went down, and sent the *conciërge* to attend her, and then sat up listening to the sounds that continued to reach me till a late hour of the night. Early in the morning, I heard Madame Bouïsse return, and assist Naomie to rise. I feared to offend her, if I even went to enquire at her door, but when they left the room, and passed down the staircase, I flew to my window, and watched eagerly. I saw her cross the street in the grey morning. She walked feebly, and wore a

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large cloak which concealed the disabled arm. The husband of Madame Bouïsse followed her, with the valise upon his shoulder. She never once looked up—not once ! And so they passed under the archway across the trodden snow, and disappeared.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A PRESCRIPTION.

THE week went by—the fortnight went by—but Naomie returned not. Where could she be? Why did she not come? Was she ill? Had any accident happened to her on the road, and might she not, even now, be lying, sick and helpless, at the mercy of strangers? What if the wounded hand had failed to heal? What if inflammation had set in, and she were wanting skilful aid and treatment? These questions recurred to me at every moment, and tormented me to the verge of despair. Vainly did I interrogate Madame Bouisse. The good-natured *conciérge* knew no more of the matter than myself, and the little that she had to tell only increased my uneasiness.

Naomie, it appeared, had taken two such journeys before, and had, on both occasions, started away with every manifestation of anxiety and haste. From the first she returned after an interval of more than three weeks—from the second after a period of only four or five days. Each absence had been followed by a long season of despondency and lassitude, during which, said the *conciérge*, Mademoiselle Prévôt scarcely spoke to any one; went out to her teaching, and came back in the evenings, pale and silent as a ghost, and sat up later than ever with her books and papers. As for this last journey, all she knew was that the young lady had had her passport regulated for foreign parts, and that she left by the Strasbourg railway.

“But did she say nothing respecting the motive of her sudden departure?” I urged. “Did she say nothing to account for it?”

“Nothing, m’sieur.”

“Nothing about her return, either, Madame Bouisse?”



"Nothing, m'sieur, except, by the way—"

"Except what?"

"*Dâme* ! only this : as she was going out of the hall with my husband, she turned back and shook hands with me—Mam'selle Naomie, proud as she is, is never above shaking hands with me, I can tell you, m'sieur."

"No, no—I can well believe it. Pray go on !"

"Well, m'sieur, she shakes hands with me, and she says, 'thank you, good Madame Bouisse for all your kindness to me—' Hear that, m'sieur—'good Madame Bouisse,' the dear child !"

"And then—?"

"Bah ! how impatient you are ! Well, then, she says (after thanking me, you observe)—'I have paid you my rent, Madame Bouisse, up to the end of the present month, and if, when the time has expired, I have neither written nor returned, consider me still as your tenant. If, however, I do not come back at all, I will let you know farther respecting the care of my books and other property.'"

If she did not come back at all ! Oh, heaven ! was such a possibility to be for one moment entertained ? I left Madame Bouisse without another word, and, going up to my own rooms, flung myself upon the bed, as if I were stupified. All that night, all the next day, those words haunted me. They seemed to burn themselves into my brain in letters of fire. Dreaming, I started up uttering them—reading, they started upon me from the page. "If I never come back at all !"—Oh Naomie ! Naomie !

At last, when the third day came round—the third day of the third week of her absence—I became so languid and desponding that I lost all power of application.

Even Dr. Lucet noticed it, and calling me, in the afternoon to his private room, said—

"Stanton Leigh, you look ill. Are you working too hard ?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Humph ! Do you go out much at night ?"

"Go out, sir?"

"Yes—don't echo my words—do you go out into society; frequent balls, theatres, and so forth?"

"I have not done so, sir, for several months past."

"What is it then? Do you read late?"

"Really, sir, I hardly know—up to about one or two o'clock, on the average, I believe."

"Let me feel your pulse."

I put out my wrist, and he held it for some seconds, looking keenly at me all the time.

"Got anything on your mind?" he asked, after he had dropped it again. "Want money, hey?"

"No, sir, thank you."

"Home-sick?"

"Not in the least."

"Hah! want amusement. Can't work perpetually—not reasonable to suppose it. There, Leigh," (taking a folded paper from his pocket-book) "there's a prescription for you. Make the most of it."

It was a stall-ticket for the opera. Too restless and unhappy to reject any chance of relief, however temporary, I accepted it, and went. I had not been to a theatre since that night with Celestine, nor to the Italian Opera since I used to go with Madame de Launay. As I went in listlessly, and took my place, the lights, the noise, the multitude of faces, confused and dazzled me. Presently the curtain rose, and the piece began. The opera was *I Capuletti*. I do not remember who the singers were; I am not sure that I ever knew. To me they were Romeo and Juliet, and I was a dweller in Verona. The story—the music—the scenery,—all took a vivid hold upon my imagination. From the moment the curtain rose, I saw only the stage, and, excepting that I in some sort established a dim comparison between Romeo's sorrows and my own disquietude of mind, I lost all recollection of time, and place, and almost of my own identity. It even seemed natural that that ill-fated pair of lovers should go through life singing, be

happy singing, and die singing. And why not? Are they not airy nothings, "born of romance, cradled in poetry, thinking other thoughts, and doing other deeds than ours?" As they live in poetry, so may they with perfect fitness speak in song, and still be true to our type of the ideal.

I went home in a dream, with the melodies ringing in my ears, and the story lying heavy at my heart. I passed upstairs in the dark, went over to the window, and saw, oh joy! the light—the dear, familiar, welcome, blessed light, streaming forth, as of old, from Naomie's chamber!

To thank heaven that she was safe was my first impulse—to step out on the balcony, and watch the light as though it were a part of herself, was the second. I had not been there many moments when it was obscured by a passing shadow. The widow opened, and she came out.

"Good evening," she said, in her calm, clear voice, inclining her head at the same time, the very least in the world. "I heard you out here, and thought you might like to know that, thanks to your treatment, in the first instance, and such care as I have been able since to give it, my hand is once more in working order."

"You are indeed kind," I said; "I had no hope of seeing you to-night. How long is it since you arrived?"

"About an hour," she replied, carelessly.

"And you have been nearly three weeks away!"

"Have I?" said she, leaning her cheek upon her hand, and looking up dreamily into the sky. "I did not count the days."

"A proof that you passed them happily," rejoined I, not without some secret bitterness.

"Happily!" she echoed. "Alas, sir, that is a word which may be very variously interpreted!"

"We interpret it variously, according to our needs," I replied.

She looked at me searchingly.

"And your reading of the oracle?" she said interrogatively.

I hesitated.

"Do you enquire what is my need, individually?" I asked, "or do you want my general definition?"

"The latter."

"I think, then, that the first requirement of happiness is work; the second, success."

She bowed concurrence.

"I accept your definition," she said, "and hope that you may realise to the full in your own experience. For myself, know that I have toiled and failed—sought, and found not. Judge, then, how I came to leave the days uncounted."

The grave sadness of her attitude, the melancholy import of her words, the abstraction of her manner, filled me with a vague uneasiness.

"Failure is often but the herald of success," I replied, for want, perhaps, of something better to say.

She shook her head drearily, and stood looking up at the sky, where, every now and then, the moon shone out fitfully between the flying clouds.

"It is not the first time," she murmured, "nor will it be the last; and yet they say that God is merciful."

She had forgotten my presence. These words were not spoken to me, but in answer to the questionings of her own soul. I kept silence, and watched her upturned face. It was pale as the wan moon overhead, thinner than before she went away, and sadder—oh, how much sadder!

She roused herself presently, as by a strong effort, and, turning to me, said—

"I beg your pardon. I am very absent; but I am greatly fatigued. I have been travelling incessantly for two days and nights."

"Then I will be unselfish, and wish you good-night at once," I said, promptly.

"Good-night," she replied, and went back into her room.

The next morning, Dr. Lucet smiled one of his cold smiles, and said—

“ You look better to-day, my young friend. I knew how it was with you—no worse malady, after all, than *ennui*. I shall take care to repeat the medicine from time to time.”

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### UNDER THE STARS.

THE next night, at the same hour, I went out upon my balcony, hoping, yet scarcely expecting, to see her. The light shone, but no shadow obscured it, and no window opened ; so, after waiting for more than an hour, I gave her up, and returned to my work. I did this for six nights in succession. On the seventh she came.

"You are fond of your balcony, fellow-student," said she. "I often hear you out here."

I was about to make an imprudent answer, but checked myself in time.

"My room gets heated, and my brain weary," I replied ; "and this keen, clear air does me service."

"Yes, it is delicious," said she, pacing backwards and forwards. "How dark the space of heaven is, and how bright the stars ! What a night for the Alps ! I should like now to be on the summit of the Righi, watching the moon through a good telescope, and waiting for the sunrise."

"Defer that wish for a couple of months," I rejoined, smiling. "You would scarcely like Switzerland in her white winter garments."

"*Pardon !* I do like Switzerland very much under that aspect," she replied, hastily. "I passed through part of the Jura range ten days ago, and saw nothing but snow. It looked like Titanic sculpture, or a world awaiting the creation of colour !"

"A grand image," said I ; "and spoken like an artist !"

"Like an artist !" she repeated, musingly. "Are not all students artists in their several degrees ?"

"Not all," I answered. "Not, for instance, the student of the exact sciences. He is the slave of Fact, and Art is

the paradise from which he is banished. His imagination is for ever captive. His horizon is for ever bounded. His very thoughts must put on the livery of his predecessors, and, though endowed with all the impulse of genius, skill, mere skill, must yet be the end of his ambition!"

She looked at me with quiet earnestness, and the moonlight revealed that sad smile which her lips so often wore.

"You do not love your profession," she said, at length, "and yet you labour zealously to acquire it. How is that?"

"How is it with hundreds of others who are in the same position?"

"Why not relinquish it for one more congenial?"

"My father chose it for me, and, like Socrates, I prefer my prison to the violation of my duty."

Mademoiselle Naomie laughed aloud.

"Truly a modest comparison!" she exclaimed, merrily. "Let us hope, however that, like Socrates, your constancy will not end in a dose of hemlock, and the sacrifice of a cock to Esculapius! But tell me, what career your would prefer?"

"I scarcely know. Anything less circumscribed than medicine."

"Geology, perhaps, or astronomy?"

"Neither. The bowels of the earth are too profound for me, and the heavens too lofty. I need some pursuit that would set my imagination free. I respect Science, but my soul echoes to the name of Art."

"The artist creates—the man of science discovers," said Naomie. "You fancy you would prefer the work of creation, only because you have not sufficient patience to pursue the work of discovery. Beware, fellow-student! beware, lest you deceive yourself! and pardon me if I suggest that you are, perhaps, fitted for neither. Your sphere is reflection. You are not essentially born for action. You have more taste than ambition and love learning better than fame. Am I right?"

"Perfectly," I replied, with astonishment.

"Therefore," continued she, "you are not more likely to be content with Art than with Science. Nay, you would find yourself even more bitterly discouraged; for in Science every step is a certain gain, but in Art every step is groping, and success only another form of effort. Art, in so far as it is more divine, is more unattainable, more evanescent, more unsubstantial. It needs as much patience as Science, and the passionate devotion of an entire life is as nothing in comparison with the magnitude of the work. Self-sacrifice, self-distrust, infinite patience, infinite disappointment—such is the lot of the artist, such the law of aspiration!"

"A melancholy creed!" said I, sadly.

"But a true one. The divine is doomed to suffering, and the crown of the poet is a crown of thorns for ever!"

"But, amid all this record of his pains, do you make no count of his pleasures?" I asked. "You forget that he has moments of enjoyment lofty as his aims, and deep as his devotion."

"I do not forget it" she said. "I know it but too well. Alas! is not the catalogue of his pleasures the more melancholy record of the two? Hopes which sharpen disappointment; visions which cheat while they enrapture; dreams that embitter his waking hours—fellow-student, do you envy him these?"

"I know not. Perhaps they repay him. Would he forego them, think you, for a life of mediocre annoyances and placid satisfactions?"

"Forego them!" echoed she. "Never! Who that had been the guest of the gods would be content to forego the Divine for the Human? No, fellow-student—no! Better sorrow than banishment; better fall nobly, than never dare to climb! He is paid—over-paid, in his brief seasons of joy. He becomes something more than man. He lingers on the threshold of the gateways of heaven, and his soul converses with angels!"



She spoke with a rare and passionate enthusiasm, sometimes pacing to and fro ; sometimes pausing with clasped hands, and upturned face—

“ A dauntless muse who eyes a dreadful fate !”

There was a long, long silence—she looking at the stars, I upon her face.

By and by she came over to where I stood, and leaned upon the railing that divided our separate territories.

“ Friend,” said she, gravely, “ be content. Art is the true Sphinx, and to question her is destruction. Enjoy books, pictures, music, statues—rifle the world of beauty to satiety, if satiety be possible—but there pause. Drink the wine ; seek not to crush the grape. Be happy, be useful, labour honestly upon the task that is thine, and be assured that the work will itself achieve its reward. Is it nothing to relieve pain—to prolong the days of the sickly—to restore health to the suffering—to soothe the last pangs of the dying? Is it nothing to be followed by the prayers and blessing of those whom you have restored to love, to fame, and to the world’s service? To my thinking, the physician’s trade hath something god-like in it. Be content, friend ; be content. Harvey’s discovery was as sublime as Newton’s, and it were hard to say which did God’s work the best—Shakespeare, or Jenner !”

Excited beyond the power of concealing what I felt, I almost bowed myself before her, and exclaimed—

“ Who are you, what are you, that you should move me thus? Why do your words depress, console, agitate me, as the winds sweep over the waves of the sea, and control the trees of the forest ?

Am I an instrument, that you do play upon me ?

Are you a musician that you touch all the keys of my being ?”

Naomie laughed, with a sudden change of mood, and shook her head—

“ I am a woman,” said she. “ Simply a woman—no

more. One of the inferior sex, and, as I told you long ago, only half-civilised."

"You are unlike every other woman!"

"Possibly because I am more useless. Strange as it may seem, do you know I love Art better than sewing; prefer thinking to gossip; esteem duty as something of even greater importance than dress; and hold my liberty to be a dower more precious than either beauty or riches! And yet—I am a woman!"

"The wisest, virtuouslest, discreetest, best?"

"By no means. You are comparing me to Eve; but I am not in the least like Eve, I assure you. She was an excellent housewife, and, if we may believe Milton, knew how to prepare 'dulcet creams' and all sorts of Paradisaical dainties for her husband's dinner. I, on the contrary, could not make a cream to save my life—much less a syllabub!"

"Woe is me!" I exclaimed, with serio-comic despair. "Now that you have called up your familiar demon, there is no hope for me!"

"My familiar demon!—who is he?"

"Satire."

"And was Eve satirical?"

"Propound that question to one more learned in theology," said I, jestingly. I only know that she was the first and fairest of her sex, and that you are as wise as are beautiful."

"Nay, that is what Titania said to the ass," laughed Naomie. "Your compliments become equivocal, fellow-student. But, hush! what hour is it?"

She stood with uplifted finger. The air was keen, and over the silence of the housetops chimed the church-clocks—Two.

"It is late, and cold," said she, drawing her cloak more closely around her.

"Not later than you usually sit up," I replied. "Don't go yet.—'Tis now the very witching hour of night, when churchyards yawn"—

"I beg your pardon," she interrupted. "The churchyards have done yawning by this time, and, like other respectable citizens, are sound asleep. Let us follow their example. Good-night."

"Good-night," I replied, reluctantly; but almost before I had said it, she was gone.

After this, as the spring drew on, Naomie's balcony became once more a garden, and she attended to her flowers almost every evening. At these times we held long student talks in the open air, touching on many things, real and ideal. Sometimes we spoke of foreign lands; sometimes of purely abstract matters; of futurity, of death, of the plurality of worlds—oftenest of Art in its manifold developments. These conversations were of even greater benefit to me than I was aware at the time. My mental health was braced by contact with that logical and subtle female intellect. Her philosophical studies had reached deeper than mine. She had explored wider fields of reading, and to a refined sympathy with all that wore the garb of poetry and beauty she added a brilliant power of repartee and antithesis, and a vein of elegant sarcasm of which it were useless to attempt a reproduction. With all our community of taste, however, and all our good fellowship, we were not one shade more intimate. I still loved on in silence—she still lived in a world apart.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THERMOPYLÆ.

"How dreary 'tis for women to sit still  
On winter nights by solitary fires,  
And hear the nations praising them far off."

AUBORA LEIGH.

ABOLISHED by the National Convention of 1793, re-established to a certain extent in 1795, reformed by Napoleon in 1803, and judiciously remodelled in 1816, on the restoration of the Bourbons in the person of Louis XVIII., the Academie Française, despite its changes of fortune, name, and government, is a noble and liberal institution. It consists of forty members, whose duty it is to compile the great dictionary, and to enrich, purify, and preserve the language. It awards prizes for poetry, eloquence, and virtue. It accords gratuities to those of the *littérati* who require pecuniary assistance. Above all, its archives contain the names of Victor Hugo, Casimir Delavigne, Lebrun, Madame de Girardin, Louise Colet, Barthelemy, and others equally known to the world of poetry; men-poets and women-poets alike, without distinction of sex, or limitation of honours. When a seat becomes vacant amid this august body—when a prize is to be awarded—when an anniversary is to be kept, profound grows the interest in certain circles, intense the excitement, racking the suspense. To the commercial, the political, and the elegant world, these events are nothing. They affect no great questions of credit, and they sway neither the fashions nor the funds. But to the striving author, to the aspiring poet, to the rising orator, to the learned, the unknown, and the needy, they are both life and honour.

Secluded from all society, literary or the reverse, I knew little and cared less, for these Academic crises. The success of one candidate was as unimportant to me as the failure of another, and I had more than once read the prize poem, or essay, without even glancing at the name of the author.

Thus it happened that, pacing to and fro under the new-leaved avenues of the Palais Royal one sunny spring morning, some two or three weeks after the conversation last recorded, I was followed by a persecuting newsvendor, with a hungry eye, mittened fingers, and a shrill voice, who persisted in reiterating close against my ear—

“News of the day, m’sieur! News of the day! Frightful murder in the Rue du Faubourg St Denis—state of the Bourse—latest despatches from the seat of war—prize poem at the Academie Française—news of the day, m’sieur! only forty centimes! news of the day!”

I refused to be interested in any of these topics, turned a deaf ear to his allurements, and only succeeded in shaking him off by a very peremptory speech indeed. I then continued my walk in solitary silence. At the farther extremity of the square, near the *Galerie vitrée* and close beside the little pagoda-like newspaper dépôt of the place, stood a large tree, since cut down, which at that time served as an advertising medium, and was daily decorated with a written placard, descriptive of the contents of the *Moniteur*, *Presse*, and other leading papers. This placard was generally surrounded by a crowd of readers, and to-day the crowd of readers was more than usually dense.

I did not often care to learn the current events, unless I chanced to take up a paper at a *café*, or *restaurant*; but my attention had been drawn to the subject, and, as I paced up and down, I amused myself by watching the eager faces of the little throng. Presently I fell in, somehow, with the rest of the idlers, and found myself conning over the placard on the tree.

The first name that met my eyes on that placard was—  
Naomie Prevot!

The sentence ran thus :—

“Grand biennial prize poem—subject, *The Pass of Thermopylæ*—successful candidate, Madlle. Naomie Prévôt.”

Breathless, amazed, I read the sentence, twice or thrice over. Naomie ! Naomie, a poet, and famous ! A pang of sharp pain shot through me. I blushed for my own lack of ambition, my natural indolence, my want of character. “What am I,” I asked myself, “that I dare aspire to the love of such a woman ? What have I achieved ? What have I attempted ? To what ends have I even aspired ? Alas ! I am nothing. I am not worthy of her, and she will despise me. Worse than all, I am selfish ; for am I not weighing her glory against her personal good—calculating my losses by her gains—repining over my obscurity, instead of rejoicing in her renown ?”

I shook off my reverie, and, hearing at a little distance the shrill voice of the importunate newsman, plunged after him down the *allée*, and stopped him, just as he had come to the “Frightful murder in the Rue du Faubourg St.—”

“Here,” said I, tapping him on the shoulder ; “give me one of your papers.”

The man’s eyes glittered.

“Only forty centimes, m’sieur,” said he ; “ ’tis the first I’ve sold to-day.”

He looked poor, and wretched. I thought of Naomie, dropped into his hand a coin that would have purchased all his little sheaf of journals, and walked away, not to take the change, or hear his thanks. He was silent for some moments ; then took up his cry at the point where he had broken off, and started away with—

“Denis !—state of the Bourse—latest despatches from the seat of war—news of the day—only forty centimes !”

I took my paper with me into a *café*, and read the whole account. There had been eighteen anonymous poems submitted to the Academy. Three out of the eighteen had come under discussion, and one out of the three had been warmly advocated by Béranger, one by Lebrun, and

the third by some other academician. The poem advocated by Béranger was at length chosen—the sealed paper accompanying it was opened, and found to contain the name of Naomie Prévôt; to Naomie Prévôt, therefore, the prize and crown were awarded.

I read the article through, and then went home, that I might be the first to congratulate her.

Timidly, and with a beating heart, I rang the bell at her outer door; for we all had our bells at Madame Bouisse's and lived in our rooms as if they were little private houses.

She opened the door, and, seeing me, looked surprised; for, though we often held our "modern midnight conversations," I had never yet dared to call upon her in her own apartments.

"I have come to wish you joy," said I, not venturing to cross the threshold.

"To wish me joy!" she echoed. "On what account?"

"On the newspaper account," I rejoined, smiling.

She blushed, turned pale, seemed scarcely able to articulate, and said—

"For God's sake, speak plainly. I do not understand you. Has—has anything been discovered?"

Yes; it has been discovered that Mademoiselle Naomie Prévôt has written the best poem on "The Pass of Thermopylæ!"

She drew a deep breath, pressed her hand upon her heart, and murmured—

"Alas! is that all?"

"All! Is it not enough, then, to have stepped at once into fame—to have been advocated by Béranger—to have gained the great prize, and had one's poem crowned by the Académie Française?"

She stood with drooping head, and hands clasped listlessly together. She seemed scarcely to notice my words. Instead of triumph, I beheld only despondency—instead of joy, disappointment. Presently she looked up—

"Where did you learn this news?" she asked.

I handed her the journal, for reply.

"Come in, fellow-student," said she, and held the door for me to enter.

Once again, for the third time only, I entered her little *salon*. Everything was in the self-same order, save that there were more books and manuscripts lying about than before. Now I understood the secret of her midnight vigils, and solitary recitations!

She sat down, and read the article through without a word of comment.

"Well," said I, "are you not happy?"

She shook her head, and smiled mournfully.

"Success is not happiness," she replied. "I am gratified, and I am proud. That Béranger should have defended my poem is an honour above price; but—but I need more than this to make me happy!"

And her eyes wandered, with a singular expression, to the sword above the mantel-piece.

The iron of jealousy entered straightway into my soul. Was love, then, the mystery of Naomie's life? Was love the secret of her sadness, of her strange and sudden journeys, of her lonely life, and singular seclusion? I could not speak. I shaded my face with my hand, and sat looking on the ground. By and by, finding that she was absorbed in thought, and that the silence remained unbroken, I rose, and examined the pictures on the walls.

They were painted in water-colours, and treated in a masterly, but quite peculiar style. The skies were sombre, the foregrounds singularly elaborate, the colouring stern and forcible. Angry sunsets barred with lines of purple cirrostratus—sweeps of desolate heath bounded by jagged peaks—steep mountain-passes crimson with faded ferns, and half obscured by rain-clouds—strange studies of weeds, and ruins, and lonely reaches of bleak sea-shore,—these were the subjects of the drawings, and they all bore evidence of the same pencil.



"Ah," said Naomie, perceiving at length, what I was about, are you criticising my sketches?"

"Your sketches!" I exclaimed. "Surely these are not the work of your hand?"

"Indeed they are," she replied, smiling. "What do you think of them?"

"Think of them! I think that if you had not been a poet you would have been a great painter! You are fortunate in the power to express yourself so variously! Are these from nature, or are they the creatures of your imagination?"

"They are all records of facts," she replied. "Nature is prodigal of beauty, and I am humbly content only to copy her."

"May I implore you to be your own catalogue *raisonnée*, and tell me something of the localities?"

"Willingly. This coast-line, with the run of breaking surf, was taken on the shores of Normandy, some few miles from Dieppe. This sun-set is a recollection of a glorious evening near Frankfort, and those purple mountains in the distance are part of the Tannus range. Here is an old mediæval gateway at Solothurn, in Switzerland. This wild heath near the sea is in the neighbourhood of Biscay. This quaint knot of ruinous houses in a weed-grown court was sketched at Bruges. Do you see that milk-girl with her scarlet petticoat and Flemish *faïlle*? She supplied the house where I lived, with milk, and her dairy was up that dark archway. She stood for me several times, when I required a foreground figure."

"You have travelled a great deal," I said, with some surprise. "Were you long in Belgium?"

"Yes; some years. I was first pupil, then teacher, in a large school in Brussels. I was afterwards governess in a private family in Bruges. Of late, however, I have preferred to live in Paris, and give morning lessons. By these means I have more liberty and more leisure."

"And these two little quaint bronze figures?"

"They are likenesses of Hans Sachs and Peter Vischer. I brought then from Nuremberg. Hans Sachs, you see, wears a furred robe, and presses a volume to his breast. He does not look in the least like a cobbler. Peter Vischer, on the contrary, wears his leathern apron and carries his mallet in his hand. Artist and iron-worker, he glories in his trade, and looks as sturdy a little burgher as one would wish to see."

"And this statuette in green marble?"

"A copy of the celebrated 'Pensiero' of Michael Angelo. It is, in fact, the portrait of Lorenzo de Medicis, and surmounts his tomb in the Medicean Chapel at Florence. I had it executed for me on the spot, by Bezzanti."

"What a noble figure!" I exclaimed. "How instinct with life, and strength, and meditation!"

"Indeed it is," replied she. "My first thought, on seeing the original, was that I should scarcely have courage to pass a night alone with it. I should every moment expect the musing hand to be withdrawn from the stern mouth, and the face uplifted to gaze upon me!"

"These," said I, pausing at the chimney-piece, "are evidently *souvenirs* of Switzerland. How delicately those chamois are carved out of the hard wood. They almost seem to snuff the mountain air! But here is a rapier with a hilt of ornamented steel—where did this come from?"

I had purposely led up the conversation to this point. I had patiently questioned and examined for the sake of this one enquiry, and I waited her reply as flutteringly as if my life hung on it.

Naomie's whole countenance changed. She took it down, and her eyes filled with tears.

"It was my father's," she said, tenderly.

"Your father's!" I exclaimed, joyfully. "Heaven be thanked! Did you say your father's?"

She looked up with undisguised surprise; then smiled, and faintly blushed.

"I did," she replied.

"And was your father a soldier?"

"It was his sword," she answered, "and he had the best of all rights to carry it."

And so she kissed the weapon reverently, and restored it to its place.

I kissed her hand at parting that day, quite as reverently, and she did not withdraw it. Ah, it was spring indeed! Spring sun-shine in the heavens, and in my heart!

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### ALL ABOUT ART.

"Art's a service."

AURORA LEIGH.

"God sent art, and the devil sent critics," said Müller, dismally paraphrasing a popular proverb. "My picture is rejected!"

"Rejected!" I echoed, surprised to find him sitting on the floor, like a tailor, in front of an acre of canvas. "By whom?"

"By the Hanging Committee."

"Hang the hanging Committee!"

"A pious prayer, my friend; would that it could be carried into execution!"

"What cause do they assign?"

"Cause! Do you suppose they trouble themselves to find one? Not a bit of it. They simply scrawl a great R in chalk on the back of it, and send you a circular notice to carry it home again. What is it to them, if a poor devil has been painting his very heart and hopes out, day after day, for a whole year, upon that piece of canvas? Nothing, and less than nothing—confound them!"

I drew a chair before the picture, and set myself to a thorough examination of all its details. He had chosen a difficult subject; the death of Louis XI. The scene represented was a spacious chamber in the Castle of Plessis-les-Tours. To the left, in a great oak chair, beside the bed from which he had just risen sat the dying king, with the crown upon his head, and the royal mantle loosely thrown around him. At his feet, with his face buried in his hands, the kneeled Dauphin; and behind his chair, holding up the crucifix to enjoin silence, stood the king's confessor. A physician, a couple of councillors in their furred

robes, and a captain of archers stood somewhat back, whispering together, and watching the countenance of the dying man; while, through the half-open door was seen a crowd of courtiers and pages, waiting to congratulate King Charles VIII. Ambitious as the subject was, Müller had conceived it in a grand spirit. The heads were expressive, and the textures of the velvets, tapestries, oak carvings, and so forth, had been executed with more than ordinary finish and fidelity. For all this, it could not be denied that there was more of promise than of achievement in the work. The lights were scattered; the attitudes were stiff; there was too much effort apparent, and too evident an aiming at effect. One could see that it was the work of a young painter, who, inspired with the true fire, had yet much to learn, and even more to forget.

"Well," said Müller, still sitting ruefully on the floor, what do you think of it? Am I rightly served? Shall I send for a big pail of whitewash, and blot it all out?"

"Not for the world!"

"What shall I do, then?"

"Do better."

"But if I have done my best already?"

"Still do better; and when you have done that, do better again. So genius toils higher, and ever higher, and like the climber of the glacier, plants its foot where only its hand clung the moment before."

"Humph! but what of my picture?"

"Well," I said, hesitatingly, "I am no critic——"

"Thank heaven!" muttered Müller, parenthetically.

"But there is something noble in the disposition of the figures, and the falling of the light. I should say, however, that you had set to work upon too large a scale."

"A question of focus," said the painter hastily. "A mere question of focus."

"How can that be, when you have finished some parts laboriously, and in others seem scarcely to have troubled yourself to cover the canvas?"

"I don't know. I'm impatient, you see, and—and I think I got tired of it, towards the last."

"Would that have been the case if you had allowed yourself but half the space?"

"I'll take to enamel," exclaimed Müller, with a grin of hyperbolic despair. "I'll immortalise myself in miniature. I'll paint henceforward with the aid of a microscope, and never again look at nature unless through the wrong end of a telescope."

"Pshaw!—be in earnest, man, and talk sensibly. Do you expect to go through your professional life without disappointments? Or do you conceive that for every failure you are to change your style? Come, be yourself. You have the true stuff in you. Give yourself, heart and soul, to the school in which you have begun, and make up your mind to succeed."

"Do you believe, then, that a man may succeed by force of will alone?" said Müller, musingly.

"Yes, because force of will proceeds from force of character, and the two together, warp and woof, make the stuff out of which nature clothes her heroes."

"Oh, but I am not talking of heroes," said Müller.

"By heroes I do not mean only soldiers. Captain Pen is as good a hero as Captain Sword, any day; and Captain Brush, to my thinking, is as fine a fellow as either."

"Aye; but do they come, as you would seem to imply, of the same stock?" said Müller. "Force of will and force of character are famous clays in which to mould a Wellington or a Columbus; but is not something more—at all events, something different—necessary to the modelling of a Raffaele?"

"I am hardly disposed to allow it. Power is the first requisite of genius. Give power in equal quantity to your Columbus and your Raffaele, and circumstance shall decide which will achieve the New World, and which the Transfiguration,"

"Circumstance!" cried the painter, impatiently. "Good

heavens! do you make no account of the spontaneous tendencies of genius? Is nature a mere vulgar cook, turning out men, like soups, from one common stock, with only a dash of flavouring here and there, to give them variety? No—nature is a subtle chemist, and her workshop, depend on it, is stored with delicate elixirs, volatile spirits, and precious fires of genius. Some of these are kneaded with the clay of the poet, some with the clay of the painter, the astronomer, the mathematician, the legislator, the soldier. Raffaele had in him some of ‘the stuff that dreams are made of.’ Never tell me that the same stuff, differently directed, would equally well have furnished forth an Arhchimedes or a Napoleon!”

“Men are what the age demands that they shall be,” I replied, after a moment’s consideration. “Be that demand what it may, the supply is ever equal to it. Capital of the most pompous and fascinating of religions, Rome, demanded Madonnas and Transfigurations, and straightway we had Giotto, Raffaele, Guido. The Old World, overstocked with men, gold, and aristocracies, asked wider fields of enterprise, and lo!—Columbus added America to the map! What is this but circumstance? Had Italy needed colonies, would not her men of genius have turned sailors and discoverers? Had Madrid been the residence of the Popes, might not Columbus have built another St. Peter’s?”

Müller, still sitting on the floor, shook his head despondingly.

“I don’t think it,” said he, “and I don’t wish to think it. It is too material a view of genius to satisfy my imagination. I love to believe that gifts are special. I love to believe that the poet is born a poet, and the artist an artist.”

“Hold! I believe that the poet is born a poet, and the artist an artist; but I also believe the poetry of the one and the art of the other to be only diverse manifestations of a power that is universal in its application. The artist

whom circumstance has trained to the work of the builder is none the less an artist. The poet, though engineer or soldier, is none the less a poet. There is the poetry of language, and there is also the poetry of action. So also there is the art which expresses itself by means of marble or canvas, and the art which designs a capital, tapers a spire, or plants a pleasure-ground. Nay, is not this very interfusion of gifts, this universality of uses, in itself the bond of beauty which girdles the world like a cestus? If poetry were only rhyme, and art only painting, to what an outer darkness of matter-of-fact should we be condemning nine-tenths of the creation!"

Müller yawned, as if he would have swallowed me and my argument together.

"You are getting transcendental," said he. "I dare say your theories are all very fine, and all very true; but I confess that I don't understand them. I never could find out all this poetry of bricks and mortar, railroads and cotton-factories, that people talk about so fluently now-a-days. We Germans take the dreamy side of life, and are seldom at home in the practical, be it never so highly coloured and highly flavoured. In our parlance, an artist is an artist, and not a bagman or an engine-driver!"

His professional pride was touched, and he said this with somewhat less than his usual *bonhomie*—almost with a shade of irritability."

"Come," said I, smiling, "we will not uselessly discuss a topic which we can never see from the same point of view. Doing art is better than talking art, and your business now is to find a subject, and lay in fresh store of canvas and colours. In the meantime, cheer up, and forget all about Louis XI. and the Hanging Committee. What say you to dining with me at the Trois Freres? It will do you good."

"Good!" cried he, springing to his feet, and shaking his fist at the picture. "More good, by Jupiter, than all the paint and megilp than ever was wasted. Not all the fine



arts of Europe are worth a *poulet à la Marengo*, and a bottle of old *Romanée* !”

So saying, he turned his picture to the wall, seized his cap, locked his door, scrawled out-side with a piece of chalk,—

“ *Summoned to the Tuileries on state affairs,*”

and followed me, whistling, down the six flights of gloomy, rickety, Quartier-Latin lodging-house stairs, up which he lived and had his being.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

I MAKE MYSELF ACQUAINTED WITH THE IMPOLITE WORLD,  
AND ITS PLACES OF UNFASHIONABLE RESORT.

MULLER and I dined merrily at the Café of the Trois Frères Provencaux, discussed our coffee and cigars outside the Rotonde in the Palais Royal, and then started off in search of adventures, determined, in student phraseology, to make a night of it. Striking up in a north-easterly direction through a labyrinth of narrow streets, we emerged at the Rue des Fontaines, just in front of that celebrated market for everything second hand, yecept the Temple. It was Saturday night, and the business of the place was at its height. We went in, and, turning aside from the broad thoroughfares, which intersect the market at right angles, plunged at once into a net-work of crowded side-alleys, noisy and populous as a colony of hives. Here were bargainings, haggling, quarrellings, elbowings, slang, low wit, laughter, abuse, cheating, and chattering enough to turn the head of a neophyte like myself. Müller, however, was in his element. He took me up one row and down another, pointed out all that was curious, had a nod for every grisette, and an answer for every touter, and enjoyed the Babel, like one "to the manner born."

"Buy messieurs, buy! what will you buy?" was the question that assailed us on both sides, wherever we went.

"What do you sell, *mon ami*?" was Müller's invariable reply.

"What do you want, m'sieur?"

"Twenty-five thousand francs per annum, and the prettiest wife in Paris," says my friend, a reply which is sure to evoke something *spirituel*, after the manner of the locality.

"This is the most amusing place in Paris," observes he. "Like the Alsatia of old London, it has its own peculiar *argôt*, and its own peculiar privileges. The activity of its commerce is amazing. If you buy a pocket-hankerchief at the first stall you see on coming in, and leave it unprotected in your coat pocket for five minutes, you may purchase it again at the other end of the market before you leave. In fact, you may buy anything you please here, from a Court suit to a cargo of old rags. In this alley, (which is the aristocratic quarter,) are sold old jewellery, old china, old furniture, silks that may have rustled at the Tuileries; fans that may have fluttered at the opera; gloves once fitted to tiny hands, and yet bearing a light soil where the rings were worn beneath; laces that may have been the property of countesses or cardinals; masquerade suits, epaulettes, uniforms, furs, perfumes, artificial flowers, and all sorts of elegant superfluities, most of which have descended to the merchants of the Temple through the hands of ladies-maids and valets. Yonder lies the district called the "Forêt Noire," a land of displeasing atmosphere, inhabited by cobblers, and clothes-menders; down to the left you see nothing but rag and bottle-shops, old-iron stores, and lumber of every kind; and here you find chiefly household articles, bedding, upholstery, crockery, and so forth.

"What will you buy, messieurs?" continued to be the cry, as we moved along arm-in-arm, elbowing our way through the crowd, and exploring this singular scene in all directions.

"What will you buy, messieurs?" shouts one salesman.  
- "A carpet? a capital carpet, neither too large nor too small. Just the size you want?"

"A hat, m'sieur, better than new?" cries another; "just aired by the last owner."

"A coat that will fit you better than if it were made for you?"

"A pair of boots? Dress-boots, dancing boots, walking-

boots, morning-boots, evening-boots, riding-boots, fishing-boots, hunting-boots,—all sorts, m'sieur—all sorts?"

"A cloak, m'sieur?"

"A lace shawl to take home to madame?"

"An umbrella, m'sieur?"

"A reading lamp?"

"A warming pan?"

"A pair of gloves?"

"A shower-bath?"

"A hand organ?"

"What m'sieurs, do you buy nothing this evening? Hola Antoine! monsieur keeps his hands in his pockets, for fear his money should fall out!"

"Bah! They've not a sous between them!"

"Go down the next turning and have the hole in your coat mended!"

"Make way there for monsieur the millionaire!"

"They are ambassadors on their way to the Court of Persia."

"*Ohe Panè! panè! panè!*"

Thus we ran the gauntlet of all the tongues in the Temple, sometimes retorting, sometimes laughing and passing on, sometimes stopping to watch the issue of a dispute, or the clinching of a bargain.

"*Dame*, now! if it were only ten francs cheaper," says a voice that strikes my ear with a sudden sense of familiarity. Turning, I discover that the voice belongs to a young woman close at my elbow, and that the remark is addressed to a good-looking workman upon whose arm she is leaning.

"What, Celestine!" I exclaim.

"*Comment!* Monsieur Leigh!"

And I find myself kissed on both cheeks before I even guess what is going to happen to me.

"Have I not also the honour of being remembered by Mademoiselle?" says Muller, taking off his hat with all the politeness possible; whereupon Celestine, in an ecstasy of recognition, embraces him likewise.

"*Mais quelle bonheur*" cries she. "And to meet in the Temple, above all places! Emile, you heard me speak of Monsieur Leigh—the gentleman who gave me that lovely shawl that I wore last Sunday to the Chateau des Fleurs—*eh bien!* this is he—and here is Monsieur Müller, his friend. Gentlemen, this is Emile, my *fiancé*. We are to be married next Friday week, and we are buying our furniture."

The good-looking workman pulled off his cap and made his bow, and we proffered the customary congratulations.

"We have bought such sweet pretty things," continued she, rattling on with all her old volubility, "and we have hired the dearest little *appartement*, on the fourth story, near the Jardin des Plantes; see—this looking-glass is ours; we have just bought it; and those maple chairs, and that chest of drawers, with the marble top. It isn't real marble, you know; but it's ever so much better than real:—not nearly so heavy, and so beautifully carved that it's quite a work of art. Then we have bought a carpet—such a sweet carpet! Is it not, Emile?"

Emile smiled, and confessed that the carpet was "*fort bien*."

"And the timepiece, Madame?" suggested the furniture dealer at whose door we were standing. "Madame should really not refuse herself the timepiece!"

Celestine shook her head.

"It is too dear, m'sieur," said she.

"*Pardon*, madame. I am giving it away,—absolutely giving it away at the price!"

Celestine looked at it wistfully, and weighed her little purse—it was a very little one and very light!

"It is so pretty!" said she.

The clock was of ormolu upon a painted stand, and was surmounted by a stout little gilt Cupid in a triumphal chariot, drawn by a pair of hard-working doves.

"What is the price of it?" I asked.

"Thirty-five francs, m'sieur," replied the dealer, briskly.

"Say twenty-five," urged Celestine.

The dealer shook his head.

"What if we did without the looking-glass?" whispered Celestine to her *fiancé*. After all, you know, a looking-glass one can live without; but how shall I have your dinners ready to time, if I don't know what o'clock it is?"

"I don't really see how we are to do without a clock," admitted Emile.

"And that darling little Cupid!"

Emile conceded that the Cupid was irresistible.

"Then we decide to have the clock, and to do without the looking glass."

"Yes, we decide."

In the meantime I had slipped the thirty-five francs into the dealer's hand.

"You must do me the favour to accept the clock as a wedding present, Mlle. Celestine," I said; "and remember, I shall expect an invitation to the wedding."

"And I also," said Müller, determined not to be out-done in generosity, "and I shall hope to be allowed to offer a little sketch to adorn the walls of your new home."

Their delight was almost too great. We shook hands all round. I am not sure that Celestine did not embrace us both on the spot. I am certain, however, that she kissed the gilt Cupid with more enthusiasm than ceremony.

"And you will both come to our wedding, too," cried she, "and we shall spend the day at St. Cloud, and have a dance in the evening, and we will invite Monsieur Gustave, and Monsieur Jules, and Monsieur Adrian—oh dear, how delightful it will be!"

"And you promise me the first quadrille?" said I.

"And me the second!" added Müller.

"Yes, yes, as many as you please."

"Then you must let us know at what time to come, and all about it; so, till Friday week, adieu!"

And thus, with more shaking of hands, and thanks, and good wishes, we parted company, leaving them still occupied with the gilt Cupid and the furniture broker.

After the dense atmosphere of the clothes-market, it is a relief to emerge upon the Boulevard du Temple—the noisy, feverish, crowded Boulevard du Temple, with its half dozen theatres, its glare of gas, its cake-sellers, bill-sellers, lemonade-sellers, cabs, cafés, gendarmes, tumblers, grisettes, and pleasure-seekers of both sexes. Here we pause awhile to applaud the performances of a company of dancing-dogs, whence we are presently drawn away by the sight of a gentleman in a *moyen age* costume, who is swallowing penknives and bringing them out at his ears, to the immense gratification of a large circle of bystanders. A little farther on lies the Jardin Turc, and here we drop in for half an hour, to restore ourselves with coffee-ices, and look on at the dancers. This done, we presently issue forth again, still in search of amusement.

“Have you ever been to the Petit Lazary?” asked my friend, as we stood at the gate of the Jardin Turc, hesitating which way to turn.

“Never; what is it?”

“The most inexpensive of theatrical luxuries—an evening’s entertainment of the mildest intellectual calibre, and the lowest possible cost. Here we are at the doors. Come in, and complete your experience of Paris life!”

The Petit Lazary occupies the last round upon the theatrical ladder. We paid something like sixpence half-penny, or seven-pence apiece, and were inducted into the dress circle. Our appearance was greeted with a round of applause. The curtain had just fallen, and the audience had nothing better to do. Müller laid his hand upon his heart, and bowed profoundly, first to the gallery, and next to the pit, whereupon they laughed, and left us in peace. Had we looked either dignified or indignant we should probably have been pelted and hissed till the curtain rose.

It is an audience in shirt sleeves, consisting for the most part of workmen, maid-servants, soldiers, and street-urchins, with a plentiful sprinkling of pick-pockets—the latter, in a strictly private capacity, being present for en-

tertainment only, without any ulterior professional views, unless provoked thereunto by peculiar temptation.

It is a noisy *entr'acte* enough. Three Vaudevilles have already been played, and while the fourth is in preparation the public amuses itself according to its own riotous will and pleasure. Nuts and apple-parings fly hither and thither; oranges describe perilous parabolas between the pit and the gallery; adventurous *gamins* make daring excursions round the upper rails; dialogues maintained across the house, and quarrels supported by means of an incredible copiousness of invective, mingled in discordant chorus with all sorts of howlings, groanings, whistlings, crowings, and yelpings, above which, in shrillest treble, rise the voices of cake and apple-sellers, and the piercing cry of the hump-back who distributes "Vaudevilles at a half-penny apiece." In the meantime, almost distracted by the patronage that assails him in every direction, the lemonade vendor strides hither and thither supplying floods of nectar at two centimes the glass; while the audience, skilled in the combination of enjoyments, eats, drinks, and vociferates to its heart's content. Fabulous meats, and pies of mysterious origin are brought out from baskets and hats. Pocket-hankerchiefs spread upon benches do duty as table cloths. Clasp knives, galette, and sucre d'orge pass from hand to hand—nay, from mouth to mouth—and in the midst of the tumult, the curtain rises. All is, in one moment, profoundly silent. The viands disappear; the lemonade seller struts away; the boys outside the gallery rails clamber back to their places. The drama, in the eyes of the Parisian, is almost a sacred rite, and not even the noisiest *gamin* would raise his voice above a whisper when the curtain is up.

The Vaudeville that follows is, to say the least of it, a perplexing performance. It has no plot in particular. The scene is laid in a lodging-house, and the discomforts of one Monsieur Bobinet, an elderly gentleman in a flowered dressing-gown and a gigantic nightcap, furnish forth all



the humour of the piece. What Monsieur Bobinet has done to deserve his discomforts, and why a certain student, named Charles, should voluntarily devote himself to the devising and inflicting of those discomforts, is a mystery which we, the audience, are never permitted to penetrate. Enough that Charles, being a youth of mischievous tastes and extensive wardrobe, assumes a series of disguises for the express purpose of tormenting Monsieur Bobinet, and is unaccountably rewarded in the end with the hand of Monsieur Bobinet's daughter; a consummation which brings down the curtain amid loud applause, and affords entire satisfaction to everybody.

It is by this time close upon midnight, and, leaving the theatre with the rest of the audience, we find a light rain falling. The noisy thoroughfare is, by this time, hushed to comparative quiet. The carriages that roll by are homeward bound. The waiters yawn at the doors of the cafés, and survey pedestrians with a threatening aspect. The theatres are fast closing up, and a row of flickering gas-lamps in front of a faded transparency which proclaims that the juvenile *Tableaux vivants* are to be seen within, denotes the only place of public amusement yet open to the curious along the whole length of the Boulevard du Temple.

"And now, *amigo*, where shall we go?" says Müller. "Are you for a billiard-room, or a lobster supper? or shall we beat up the quarters of some of the fellows in the Quartier Latin, and see what fun is afoot on the other side of the water?"

"Whichever you please; you are my guest to-night, and I am at your disposal."

"Or what say you to dropping in for an hour among the Chicards?"

"A capital idea—especially if you again entertain the society with a true story of events that never happened?"

"*Allons donc!*"—

"C'était de mon temps.  
Que brillait Madame Grègoire.  
J'allais à vingh ans,  
Dans sons cabaret rire et boire ?

—confounded this drizzle ! It soaks a man through like a sponge."

He ran, and I followed.

The rain fell faster and thicker ; we had no umbrellas ; and being by this time in a region of back streets, an empty cab was a prize not to be hoped for. Coming presently to a dark archway, we took shelter, and waited till the shower should pass over. It lasted longer than we expected, and threatened to settle into a night's steady rain. Müller kept his blood warm by practising extravagant quadrille steps, and singing scraps of Beranger ballads ; whilst I, watching impatiently for a cab, kept peering up and down the street, and listening to every sound.

Presently a quick footfall echoed along the wet pavement, and the figure of a man, dimly discernible by the blurred light of the street lamps, came hurrying up on the other side of the way. Something in the firm, free step, in the upright carriage, in the height and build of the passer-by arrested my attention. He drew nearer. He passed under the lamp just opposite, and, as he passed, flung away the end of his cigar which fell, hissing, in the little rain-torrent running down the middle of the street. He carried no umbrella ; but his hat was pulled low, and his collar drawn up, and I could see nothing of his face. But the gesture was enough. It made my heart leap. For a moment I stood still and looked after him, then, calling to Müller that I should be back presently, darted off in pursuit.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE KING OF DIAMONDS.

THE rain beat in my face and almost blinded me ; the wind hustled me ; the gendarme at the corner of the street looked at me suspiciously ; and still I ran, and still the tall stranger strided on ahead, unconscious of pursuit. Up one street he led me and down another, across a market-place, through an arcade, past the Bourse, and into that neighbourhood of small streets that lies behind the Italian Opera-house, and is bounded on the east by the Rue de Richelieu, and on the west by the Rue Louis le Grand. Here he slackened his pace, and I found myself gaining upon him for the first time. Presently he stopped altogether, and as I continued to draw nearer, I saw him take out his watch, and look at it by the light of a street lamp. This done, he began sauntering slowly backwards and forwards, as if waiting for some second person.

The rain was now abating, but I was very wet and out of breath, and so drew aside in an angle of deep shadow, to recover myself. Perhaps this was but a stranger, after all ! Deceived, if so, by an accidental resemblance, I should have had my run for my pains, and have taken cold, most likely, into the bargain. Well, it could not be helped if it were so. At all events, I would speak to him.

As I emerged from the shade and went towards him, he looked up, drew aside with the air of a man upon his guard, and put his hand quickly into his breast.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," I began——

"What, my dear Damon, is it you ?" he interrupted, and held out both his hands.

I caught them warmly in mine.

"Oliphant—dear friend," I stammered. "I thought it could be no other! I have followed you for the last mile and a half. What brings you to Paris? Why did you not let me know? How long have you been here? Has anything gone wrong? Are you well?"

"One question at a time, my Arcadian, for mercy's sake!" said he. "Which am I to answer?"

"The last."

"Oh, I am well—well enough. But let us walk on a little farther while we talk."

"Are you waiting for any one?" I asked, seeing him look round, uneasily.

"Yes—no—that is, I expect to see some one come past here presently. Step into this doorway, and I will tell you all about it."

His manner was restless, and his hand, as it pressed mine, felt hot and feverish.

"I am sure you are not well," I said, following him into the gloom of a deep old-fashioned doorway.

"Am I not? Well, I don't know—perhaps I am not. My blood burns in my veins to-night like fire. Nay, thou wilt learn nothing from my pulse, thou sucking Esculapius! Mine is a sickness not to be cured with drugs. I must let blood for it."

The short, hard laugh with which he said this, troubled me still more.

"For heaven's sake!" I urged, "you have something on your mind—what is it?"

"I have something on my hands," he replied, gloomily. "Work—work that must be done quickly, or there will be no peace for any of us. Look here, Damon—if you had a wife, and another man stood before the world as her betrothed husband—if you had a wife, and another man spoke of her as his, boasted of her; behaved in the house as if it were already his own; treated her servants as though he were their master; possessed himself of her papers; extorted money from her; brought his friends, on one pretext or

another, about her house ; tormented her, day after day, to marry him——what would you do to such a man as this ?”

“ Make my own marriage public at once, and set him at defiance,” I replied.

“ Aye, but——”

“ But what ?”

“ That alone would not content me. I must punish him with my own hand.”

“ He would be punished enough in the loss of the lady and her fortune.”

“ Not he ! He has entangled her affairs sufficiently by this time to indemnify himself for her fortune, depend on it. And as for herself—Pshaw ! he does not know what love is !”

“ But his pride——”

“ But *my* pride !” interrupted Oliphant, passionately.

“ What of my pride ?—my wounded honour ?—my outraged love ? No, no, I tell you, it is not such a paltry vengeance that will satisfy me ! Would to heaven that I had trust only my own arm from the first ! Would to heaven that, instead of having anything to say to the cursed brood of the law, I had taken the viper by the throat, and brought him to my own terms after my own fashion !”

“ But you have not yet told me what you are doing here,” I said, anxious to divert his thoughts, if possible, into a less agitating channel.

“ I am waiting to see Monsieur de Longueville.”

“ Monsieur de Longueville !”

“ Yes. That white house at the corner is one of his haunts,—a private gaming-house, never open till after midnight. I want to meet him accidentally, as he is going in.”

“ What for ?”

“ That he may take me with him. You can’t get into these places without an introduction, you know. They are too much afraid of the police.”

“ But—but do you play ?”

“ Come with me, and see. Hark ! do you hear nothing ?”

"Yes, I hear a footstep, and here comes a man."

"Let us walk to meet him, accidentally, and seem to be talking."

I took Oliphant's arm, and we strolled on in the direction of the new comer. It was not De Longueville, however, but a tall man with a grizzled beard, who crossed over, apprehensively, at our approach, but recrossed and went into the white house at the corner as soon as he thought us out of sight.

"One of the gang," said Oliphant, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "We had better go back to our doorway, and wait till the right man comes."

We had not long to wait. The next arrival was he whom we sought. We strolled on, as before, to his encounter. He did not observe our approach; but lost, apparently, in thought, came on with his eyes fixed upon the pavement.

"De Longueville, by everything that is propitious!" cried Oliphant, stopping short in his very path.

"What, Captain Oliphant returned to Paris!"

"Aye, just returned. Bored to death with Berlin and Vienna—no place like Paris, De Longueville, go where one will!"

"None, indeed. There is but one Paris, and pleasure is the true profit of all who visit it."

"Excellent. By the way, you have met Mr. Stanton Leigh at my rooms."

M. de Longueville touched his hat, and was graciously pleased to remember the fact.

"And now," pursued Oliphant, "having met, what shall we do next? Have you any engagement for the small hours, De Longueville?"

"I am quite at your disposal, Captain Oliphant. Where were you bound for?"

"Anywhere, everywhere. I want excitement."

"Would a hand at *écarté*, or a *rouge et noir* table have any attraction for you?" suggested de Longueville, falling into the trap as readily as one could have desired.

"The very thing, if you but know where such are to be found!"

"Nay, I need not take you far to find both. There is in this very street a house where money may be lost and won as easily as at the Bourse. Follow me."

He took us to the white house at the corner, and, pressing a spring concealed in the wood-work of the lintel, rung a bell of shrill and peculiar *timbre*. The door opened immediately, and, after we had passed in, closed behind us, without any visible agency. Still following at the heels of M. de Longueville, we then went up a spacious staircase dimly lighted, and, leaving our hats in an ante-room, entered unannounced, into an elegant *salon*, where some twenty or thirty *habitués* of both sexes had already commenced the business of the evening. The ladies, of whom there were not more than half-a-dozen, were all handsome, though somewhat *passées*, and more or less richly dressed. Among the men were military stocks, ribbons, crosses, stars, and fine titles in abundance. We were evidently supposed to be in very brilliant society—brilliant, however, with a fictitious lustre that betrayed the tinsel beneath, and reminded one of a fashionable reception on the boards of the Haymarket, or the Porte St. Martin. The mistress of the house, a showy-looking woman in green velvet, with a profusion of jewellery on her arms and bosom, came forward to receive us.

"Madame de St. Amaranthe—my friends, Captain Oliphant, and Mr. Stanton Leigh," said de Longueville, impressing a gallant kiss on the plump hand of the hostess.

Madame de St. Amaranthe professed herself charmed to receive any friends of M. de Longueville; whereupon M. de Longueville's friends were enchanted to be admitted to the privilege of Madame de St. Amaranthe's acquaintance. Madame de St. Amaranthe then informed us that she was the widow of a general officer who fell at Austerlitz, and the daughter, of a rich West India planter whom she called her *père adore*, and to whose suppositious memory she wiped away an imaginary tear with an embroidered pocket

handkerchief. She then begged that we would make ourselves at home, and gliding away, whispered something in De Longueville's ear, to which he replied by a nod of intelligence.

"That harpy hopes to fleece us," said Oliphant, slipping his arm through mine, and drawing me towards the *rouge et noir* table. "She has just told De Longueville to take us in hand. I always suspected the fellow was a Greek."

"A Greek?"

"Aye, in the figurative sense—a gentleman who lives by dexterity at cards."

"And shall you play?"

"By and by, not yet, because ——"

He checked himself, and looked anxiously round the room.

"Because what?"

"Tell me, Leigh," said he, paying no attention to my question, "do *you* mind playing?"

"I?" I stammered. "Why, really I—I hardly know one card from another."

"But have you any objection?"

"None whatever to the game; but a good deal to the penalty. I don't mind confessing to you that I ran into debt some months' back, and that——"

"Nonsense, boy!" interrupted Oliphant, with a kindly smile. "Do you suppose that I want you to gamble away your money? No—no! the fact is that I am here for a purpose, and it will not do to let my purpose be suspected. These Greeks want a pigeon, Will you oblige me by being that pigeon, and allowing me to pay for your plucking?"

I still hesitated.

"But you will be helping me," urged he. "If you don't sit down, I must."

"You would not lose so much," I expostulated.

"Perhaps not, if I were cool, and kept my eyes open; but to-night I am *distrail*, and should be as defenceless as yourself."



"In that case I will play for you with pleasure."

He slipped a little pocket-book into my hand.

"Never stake more than five francs at a time," said he "and you cannot ruin me. The book contains a thousand. You shall have more, if necessary ; but I think that sum will last as long as I shall want you to keep playing."

"A thousand francs !" I exclaimed. "Why, that is forty pounds !"

"If it were four hundred, and it answered my purpose," said Oliphant between his teeth, "I should hold it money well spent !"

At this moment De Longueville came up, and apologised of leaving us so long.

"If you want excitement, Captain Oliphant," said he, "I suppose you will prefer the chances of *rouge et noir* to the more skilful play of *double écarté*."

"I shall stake a few pieces presently on the green cloth," replied Harold carelessly ; "but, first of all, I want to initiate my young friend here. As to *double écarté*, Monsieur de Longueville, I need hardly tell you, as a man of the world, that I never play it with strangers."

De Longueville smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Quite right," said he. "I believe that here everything is really *de bon foi* ; but where there are cards there will always be danger. For my part, I always shuffle the pack after my adversary !"

With this he strolled off again, and I took a vacant chair at the long table, next to a lady who made way for me with the most gracious smile imaginable. Only the players sat ; so Oliphant stood behind me, and looked on. It was a green board about the size of an ordinary billiard-table, with mysterious boundaries traced here and there in yellow and red, and a cabalistic table of figures towards each end. A couple of well-dressed men sat in the centre, one to deal out the cards, and the other to pay and receive the money. The one who had the management of the cash wore a superb diamond ring, and a red and green

ribbon at his button-hole, and Oliphant whispered to me that he was Madame de St. Amaranthe's brother. As for the players, they all looked serious and polite enough, as ladies and gentlemen should, at their amusement. Some had pieces of card, which they pricked occasionally with a pin, according to the progress of the game. Some had little piles of silver, or sealed *rouleaux* lying beside them. As for me, I took out Oliphant's pocket-book, and laid it beside me, as if I were an experienced player, and meant to break the bank. For a few minutes he stood by, and then, having given me some idea of the leading principles of the game, wandered away to observe the other players. Left to myself, I played on; timidly at first, soon with more confidence, and, of course, with the novice's invariable good-fortune. My amiable neighbour drew me presently into conversation. She had a theory of chances relating to averages of colour, and based upon a bewildering calculation of all the black and red cards in the pack which she was so kind as to explain to me. I could not understand a word of it, but politeness compelled me to listen. Politeness also compelled me to follow her advice when she was so obliging as to offer it, and I lost, as a matter of course. From this moment my good luck deserted me.

"*En apparence,*" said my amiable neighbour. "You have only to play long enough, and you are sure to win."

In the meantime, I followed Oliphant with my eyes, whenever I was not actually playing; for his manner throughout the evening had seriously disquieted me. Sometimes he drew near the table and threw down a Napoleon, but without heeding the game, or caring whether he won or lost. He was always looking to the door, or wandering restlessly from table to table. Watching him thus, I thought how haggard he looked, and what deep channels were furrowed in his brow since that day when we lay together on the autumnal grass under the trees in the forest of St. Germain.

Thus a long time went by, and I found by my watch

that it was nearly four o'clock in the morning—also that I had lost six hundred francs out of the thousand. It seemed incredible. I could hardly believe that the time and the money had flown so fast. I rose in my seat and looked round for Oliphant; but in vain. Could he be gone, leaving me here? Impossible! Apprehensive of I knew not what, I pushed back my chair, and left the table. The rooms were now much fuller—more stars and moustachios; more velvets and laces, and Paris diamonds. Fresh tables, too, had been opened for *lansquenets*, *bacaret*, and *écarté*. At one of these I saw M. de Longueville, and, when he laid down his cards for the deal, seized the opportunity to enquire for my friend.

He pointed to a small inner room divided by a rich hanging from the farther end of the *salon*.

"You will find Captain Oliphant in Madame de St. Amaranthe's boudoir, playing with M. le Vicomte de Marly," said he courteously, and resumed his game.

Playing with De Marly! I felt my very heart sink within me, and my pulses quicken. Was it, then, to meet De Marly that he had come hither? and yet, to sit down with him amicably!

I could not understand it! Crowded as the rooms now were, it took me some time to thread my way across, and longer still, when I had done so, to pass the threshold of the boudoir, and obtain sight of the players. The room was very small, and filled with lookers-on. At a table under a chandelier sat De Marly and Oliphant. I could not see Oliphant's face, for his back was turned towards me; but the Vicomte I recognised at once, pale, slight, refined, with the old look of dissipation and irritability, and the same restlessness of eye and hand that I had observed on first seeing him. They were evidently playing high, and each had a pile of notes and gold lying at his left hand. De Marly kept nervously crumpling a note in his fingers, all the time. Oliphant sat motionless as a man of bronze, and, except to throw down a card as it came to his turn, never stirred a

finger, or lifted his head. There was, to my thinking, something ominous in his exceeding calmness.

"At what game are they playing?" I asked a gentleman near whom I was standing.

"At *écarté*," replied he, without removing his eyes from the players.

Knowing nothing of the game, I could only judge of its progress by the faces of those around me. A breathless silence prevailed, except when some particular subtlety in the play sent a murmur of admiration round the room. Even this was hushed almost as soon as uttered. Gradually the interest grew more intense, and the bystanders pressed closer. De Marly sighed impatiently twice or thrice, and passed his hand tremulously across his brow. It was his turn to deal. Oliphant shuffled the pack. De Marly shuffled them after him, and dealt. The falling of a pin might have been heard in the pause that followed. They had but five cards each. Oliphant played first—a queen of diamonds. De Marly played the king, and both threw down their cards. A loud murmur broke out instantaneously in every direction, and De Marly, looking excited and weary, leaned back in his chair, and called for wine. His expression was so unlike that of a victor that I thought at first he must have lost the game.

"Which is the winner?" I asked eagerly. "Which is the winner?"

The gentleman who had replied to me before, looked round with a smile of contemptuous wonder.

"Why, Monsieur le Vicomte, of course!" said he. "Did you not see him play the king?"

"I beg your pardon," I said, somewhat nettled; "but as I said before, I do not understand the game."

"*Eh bien !* the Englishman is counting out his money."

What a changed scene it was! The circle of intent faces broken and shifting—the silence succeeded by a hundred conversations—de Marly leaning back, sipping his wine, and chatting over his shoulder—the cards pushed all aside,

and Oliphant gravely sorting out little shining columns of Napoleons, and rolls of crisp bank paper! Having ranged all these before him in a row, he took out his cheque-book, filled in a page, tore it out, and laid it with the rest. Then, replacing the book in his breast-pocket, he pushed back his chair, and, looking up for the first time since the close of the game, said aloud—

“Monsieur le Vicomte de Marly, I have this evening had the honour of losing the sum of twelve thousand francs to you, at *écarté*; will you do me the favour to count this money?”

M. de Marly bowed, emptied his glass, and languidly touching each little column with one dainty finger, told over his winnings as though they were scarcely worth even that amount of trouble.

“Six rouleaux of four hundred each,” said he, “making two thousand four hundred—six notes of five hundred each, making three thousand—and an order upon Rothschild for six thousand six hundred; in all, twelve thousand. Thank you, it is quite right, Monsieur—excuse me for not remembering your name.”

Oliphant looked at him with a dangerous light, and took no notice of the apology.

“It appears to me, Monsieur le Vicomte de Marly,” said he, giving the other his full title, and speaking with singular distinctness, “that you hold the king very often at *écarté*.”

De Marly, who was filling his purse with notes, looked up with every vein on his forehead swollen and throbbing.

“Monsieur?” he exclaimed, hoarsely.

“Especially when you deal,” added Oliphant, smoothing his moustache with utter *sang-froid*, and keeping his eyes still riveted upon his adversary’s.

With an inarticulate cry, like the cry of a wild beast, de Marly sprang at him, livid and foaming with rage, and was instantly flung back against the wall, dragging the table-cloth with him, and all the wine, money, and cards upon it.

"I will have blood for this !" he shrieked, struggling with those who rushed in between. I will have blood !—blood !—blood !"

Streaming and stained with red wine, he looked, in his ghastly rage, as if he was already bathed in the blood he thirsted for.

Oliphant drew himself to his full height, and stood looking on with folded arm, and a cold smile —

"I am quite ready," said he, "to give Monsieur le Vicomte de Marly every satisfaction that he may desire."

The room was by this time crowded to suffocation, and the confusion of voices in the outer *salon* had mounted almost to a tempest.

"Oh, Oliphant !" I exclaimed passionately, "what have you done?"

"What I came to do, my dear boy," replied he. "You will have to be my second in this affair."

At this moment De Longueville came up, and hearing the last words, drew me aside and whispered—

"I act for De Marly. Pistols, of course?"

I nodded, scarcely knowing what I did.

"Your friend received the first blow, and so is entitled to the first shot," pursued he.

I nodded again.

"I don't know a better place than Bellevue. There is a famous little piece of plantation, and it is far enough from Paris to be secure. The Bois is hacknied, and the police are too much about it."

"Just so," I replied, vaguely.

"And when shall we say? The sooner the better, it always seems to me, in these cases."

He looked at his watch.

"It is now ten minutes to five," he added. "Suppose we allow them five hours to put their papers in order, and meet at Bellevue on the terrace, at ten?"

"So soon !" I exclaimed.

"Soon !" echoed De Longueville. "Why, under cir-

cumstances of such exceeding aggravation, most men would send for pistols and settle it across the table!"

I shuddered. These niceties of honour were new to me, and I had been brought up to make but little distinction between duelling and murder.

"Be it so, then, Monsieur de Longueville," I said. "We will meet you at Bellevue, at ten."

"On the terrace?"

"On the terrace."

We bowed and parted. Oliphant was already gone, and De Marly, still white, and trembling with anger, was wiping the wine from his face and shirt. The crowd opened for me right and left, as I went through the *salon*, and more than one voice whispered—

"He is the Englishman's second."

I took my hat and coat mechanically, and let myself out. It was broad daylight, and the blinding sun poured full upon my eyes as I passed into the street.

"Come, Damon," said Oliphant, crossing over to me from the opposite side of the way. "I have just caught a cab—there it is, waiting round the corner! We've no time to lose, I'll be bound."

"We are to meet them at Bellevue at ten," I replied.

"At ten? Hurra! then I've still five certain hours of life before me! Long enough, Damon, to do a world of mischief, if one had the inclination!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE DUEL AT BELLEVUE.

WE drove straight to Oliphant's rooms, and, going in with a pass-key, went up without disturbing the *conciérge*. Arrived at home, my friend's first act was to open his buffetier, and take out a loaf, a *paté de foi gras*, and a bottle of wine. I could not eat a morsel; but he supped (or breakfasted) with a capital appetite; insisted that I should lie down on his bed for two or three hours; and slipping into his dressing-gown, took out his desk and cash-box, and settled himself to a regular morning's work.

"I hope to get a nap myself before starting," said he. "I have not many debts, and I made my will the day before I married—so I have but little to transact in the way of business. A few letters to write—a few to burn—a trifle or two to seal up and direct to one or two fellows who may like a *souvenir*,—that is the extent of my task! In the meantime, my dear boy, get what rest you can. It will never do to be shakey and pale on the field, you know!"

I went, believing that I should be less in his way; and, lying down in my clothes, fell into a heavy sleep, from which, after what seemed a long time, I was awakened suddenly by the conviction that it was just ten o'clock. To start up, look at my watch, find that it was only a quarter to seven, fall profoundly asleep again, was the work of only a few minutes. At the end of another half-hour I woke with the same dread, and with the same result; and so on twice or thrice after, till at a quarter to nine I jumped up, plunged my head into a basin of cold water, and went down.

I found him fast asleep, with his arms folded upon the table, and his head resting upon his hands. Some half-



dozen letters lay folded and addressed beside him—one directed to his wife. A little pile of burnt paper fluttered on the hearth. His pistols were lying close by in their mahogany case, the blue and white steel relieved against the crimson-velvet lining. He slept so soundly, poor fellow, that I could with difficulty make up my mind to wake him. Once roused, he was alert and ready in a moment; changed his coat, took out a new pair of lavender gloves, hailed a cab from the window, and bade the driver name his own fare, if he got us to the terrace at Bellevue by five minutes before ten.

"I always like to be before my time in a matter of this kind, Damon," said he. "It's shabby to be merely punctual, when one has, perhaps, not more than a quarter of an hour to live. By the by, here are my keys. Take them, in case of accident. You will find a copy of my will in my desk—the original is with my lawyer. The letters you will post, according to the addresses, and in my cash-box you will find a paper directed to yourself."

I bent my head. I dared not trust myself to speak.

"As for the letter to Helene—to my wife," said he, turning his face away, "will you—will you deliver that with your own hands?"

"I will."

"I—I have but little time to write it," he faltered, "and I trust to you to supply the details. Tell her how I made the quarrel, and how it ended. No one suspects it to be other than a *fracas* over a game at *écarté*—no one supposes that I had any other motive, or any deeper vengeance—not even De Marly himself! I have not compromised her by word or deed. If I shoot him, I free her without a breath of scandal. If I fall——"

His voice failed, and we were both silent for some moments.

We were now past the Barrier, and speeding on rapidly towards the open country. High white houses with jalousies closed against the sun, and pretty maisonettes in formal

gardens, succeeded to the streets and shops of suburban Paris. Then came a long country road, bordered by poplars—by and by, glimpses of the Seine, and scattered farms, and villages far away—then Sèvres and the leafy heights of Bellevue overhanging the river.

We crossed the bridge, and the driver, mindful of his fare, urged on his tired horse. Some country folks met us, presently, and a waggoner with a load of fresh hay. They all smiled, and gave us “good-day” as we passed—they going to their work in the fields, and we to our work of bloodshed !

Shortly after this, the road began winding upwards past the porcelain factories, and through the village of Sèvres ; after which, having but a short distance of very steep road to climb, we desired the cabman to wait, and went up on foot. Arrived at the top, where a peep of blue daylight came streaming down upon us, through a vista literally tunnelled through a green wall of acacias, we emerged all at once upon the terrace, and found ourselves first on the field. Behind us rose a hill-side of woods—before us glassy and glittering, as if traced upon the transparent air, lay the city of palaces. Domes and spires, arches and columns of triumph, softened by distance, looked as if built of the sunshine. Far away on one side stretched the Bois de Boulogne, undulating like a sea of tender green. Still farther away on the other, lay Perè-la-Chaise—a dark hill specked with white ; cypresses and tombs. At our feet, winding round a “lawny islet,” and through a valley luxuriant in corn-fields and meadows, flowed the broad river, bluer than the sky.

“A fine sight Damon !” said Oliphant, leaning on the parapet, and coolly lighting a cigar. “If my eyes are never to open on the day again I am glad they should have rested, for the last time, on a scene of so much beauty ! Where is the painter who could paint it ? Not Claude himself, though he should come back to life on purpose, and mix his colours with liquid sunlight !”

"You are a strange creature," said I, "to talk of scenery and painters at such a moment!"

"Not at all. Things are precious according to the tenure by which we hold them. For my part, I do not know when I have admired nature so keenly as this morning. *Tiens*, here comes a carriage—our men, no doubt."

"Are you a good shot?" I asked anxiously.

"Pretty well. I can write my initials in bullet-holes on a sheet of notepaper at twenty paces; or toss up half-a-crown as I ride at full gallop, and let the daylight through it, as it comes down."

"Thank heaven!"

"Not so fast, my boy. De Marly is just as fine a shot, and one of the most skilful swordsmen in the French service."

"Aye, but the first fire is yours!"

"Is it? Well, I suppose it is. He struck the first blow, and so—here they come."

"One more word, Oliphant—did he really cheat you at *écarté*?"

"Upon my soul, I don't know. He did hold the king very often, and there are some queer stories told of him in Vienna, by the officers of the Emperor's Guard. At all events, this is not the first duel he has had to fight in defence of his good-fortune!"

De Longueville now coming forward, we adjourned at once to the wood, which lay close behind the village. A little open glade was soon found; the ground was soon measured; the pistols soon loaded. De Marly looked horribly pale, but it was the pallor of concentrated hatred, with nothing of the craven hue in it. Oliphant, on the contrary, had neither more nor less colour than usual, and puffed away at his cigar with as much indifference as if he were waiting his turn at the pit of the Comedie Française. Both were clothed in black from head to foot, with their coats buttoned to the chin.

"All is ready," said De Longueville. "Gentlemen, choose your weapons."

De Marly took his pistols one by one, weighed and poised them, examined the priming, and finally, after much hesitation, decided.

Oliphant took the first that came. They then advanced to their places—de Marly with his hat pulled low over his eyes, and one arm behind him; Oliphant, still smoking carelessly.

They exchanged bows.

"Captain Oliphant," said De Longueville, "it is your right to fire first."

"God bless you, Damon!" said my friend, shaking me warmly by the hand.

He then half-turned aside, flung away the end of his cigar, lifted his right arm suddenly, and fired.

I heard the dull thump of the ball. I saw De Marly fling up his arms, and fall forward on the grass, and Oliphant running to his assistance! The next instant he was on his knees, ghastly and bleeding, and crying for his pistol.

"Give it to me?" he gasped. "Hold me up! I—I will have his life yet! so—steady, steady!"

Shuddering, but not for his own danger, Oliphant stepped calmly back to his place; while the dying man, supported by his second, struggled to his feet, and grasped his weapon. For a moment, he once more stood upright. His eye burned; his lips contracted; he seemed to gather up all his strength for one last effort. Slowly, steadily, surely, he raised his pistol—then swaying heavily back, fired and fell again.

"Dead this time, sure enough," said De Longueville, bending over him.

"Indeed, I fear so," replied Oliphant, solemnly. "Can we do nothing to help you, Monsieur de Longueville?"

"Nothing, thank you. I have a carriage down the road, and must get further assistance from the village. You had better lose no time in leaving Paris."

"I suppose not. Good morning, Monsieur de Longueville."

"Good morning, Captain Oliphant."

We shook hands hastily; gathered the pistols into the case; hurried out of the wood, and across a field by which we avoided passing through the village; found our cab where we had left it; and in less than five minutes were rattling down the dusty hill again, and on the road to Paris. Oliphant immediately began divesting himself of his coat and waistcoat. To my horror, the shirt beneath was all soaked with blood?

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "You are not wounded?"

"Very slightly," said he. "De Marly was too good a shot to miss me altogether. Pshaw! 'tis nothing—a mere flesh-wound, with not even the bullet left in it."

"If it had been a little more to the right," I faltered—

"If he had fired one second sooner, or lived one second longer, he would have had me through the heart, as sure as there's a heaven above us!" said Oliphant, gravely. Then, seeing me lean back, pale and startled, he changed his tone, and said laughingly—

"Pooh, pooh! Damon, cheer up, and help me to tear this handkerchief into bandages. Life's a capital thing, after all!"

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE PORTRAIT.

HAVING seen Oliphant safely to his lodgings, and dressed his wound, which was, in fact, but a very slight one, I left him and went home, promising to return in a few hours, and help him with his packing ; for we both agreed that he must leave Paris that evening, come what might.

It was now close upon two o'clock, and I had been out since between three and four the previous afternoon—not quite twenty-four hours, in point of actual time; but a week, a month, a year, in point of sensation ! Had I not seen a man die since that hour yesterday ? Walking homewards through the garish streets in the hot after noon, all the strange scenes in which I had just been an actor thronged fantastically upon my memory. The joyous dinner with Franz Müller ; the busy Temple ; the noisy theatre ; the long chase through the wet streets at midnight ; the crowded gaming-house ; the sweet country drive at early morning ; the quiet wood, and the dead man lying on his back, with the shadows of the leaves upon his face,—all this, in strange distinctness, came between me and the living tide of the Boulevards.

And now, over-tired and over-excited as I was, I remembered for the first time that I had eaten nothing since the previous evening. And then I also remembered that I had left Müller waiting for me under the archway, without a word of explanation ! I promised myself that I would write to him as soon as I got home, and, in the meantime, turned in at the first Café to which I came, and called for breakfast. But when the breakfast was brought, I could not eat it. The coffee tasted bitter to me. The meat stuck in my throat. I wanted rest more than food—rest of body and mind, and

the forgetfulness of sleep! So I paid my bill, and, leaving the untasted meal, went home like a man in a dream.

Madame Bouïsse was not in her little lodge as I passed in—neither was my key on its accustomed hook. I concluded that she was cleaning my rooms, and so, going upstairs, found my door open; but hearing my own name, paused involuntarily upon the threshold.

"And so, as I was saying," pursued a husky voice, which I knew at once to be the property of Madame Bouïsse, "M'sieur Leigh's friend painted it on purpose for him; and I am sure if he was as good a Catholic as the Holy Father himself, and that picture was a true portrait of our Blessed Lady, he could not worship it more devoutly. I believe he says his prayers to it, now. I often find it in the morning hung by the foot of his bed; and when he comes home of an evening to study his books and papers, it always stands on a chair just in front of his table, so that he can see it without turning his head, every time he lifts his eyes from the writing!"

In the murmured reply that followed, almost inaudible though it was, my ear distinguished a tone that vibrated through every nerve of my frame.

"Well, I can't tell, of course," said Madame Bouïsse, in answer, evidently, to the remark just made. "But if mam'selle will only ask the trouble to look in the glass, and then look at the picture, she will see how like it is. For my part, I believe it to be that, and nothing else. Do you suppose I don't know the symptoms? *Dame!* I have eyes, as well as my neighbours, and you may take my word for it, mam'selle, that poor young gentleman is just as much in love as ever a man was in this world!"

"No more of this, I beg, Madame Bouïsse," said Naomie, so distinctly that I could no longer be in doubt. "I believe you to be in error; and——"

I stayed to hear no more; but retreating softly down the first flight of stairs, came noisily up again, and went straight into my rooms, saying—

"Madame Bouïsse, are you here?"

"Not Madame Bouïsse alone, but an intruder who implores forgiveness," said Naomie, with a frank smile, but a heightened colour.

I bowed profoundly. My face told her how welcome was that intrusion.

"It was Madame Bouïsse who lured me in," continued she, "to look at yonder painting."

"*Mais, oui !* I told mam'selle that you had her portrait in your sitting-room," laughed the fat *conciërge*, leaning on her broom. "I'm sure it's quite liké enough to be hers, bless her sweet face!"

I felt myself turn scarlet. To conceal it, I took the picture down, and carried it to the window.

"You will see it better by this light," I said, affecting to dust it with my handkerchief. "It is quite worth a close examination."

Naomie knelt down, and studied it for some moments in silence.

"It must be a copy," she said presently, more to herself than me "It must be a copy!"

"It is, of course, a copy," I replied. "The original is at the Chateau de Beaurepaire, near Monthery."

"And may I ask how you became possessed of this?"

"By requesting an artist to reproduce it for me."

"Then it was done especially for you?"

"Just so."

"And, no doubt, you value it?"

"More than anything that I possess!"

Then, fearing that I had said too much, I added—

"Had I not admired the original very much, I should not have wished for a copy."

She shifted the position of the picture in such a manner that, standing where I was, I could no longer see her face.

"Then you have seen the original," she said, in a low tone.

"Undoubtedly—and you?"



"Yes, I have seen it; but not lately."

There was a brief pause.

"Madame Bouïsse thinks it so like yourself, mademoiselle," I said timidly, "that it might almost be your portrait."

"That may well be," faltered Naomie; "for it is strangely like my father."

And with this, still kneeling, she dropped her face in her hands and wept silently.

Touched, troubled, dismayed, I knew not what to say, or what to do. Had I dared, I would have folded her in my arms, and blessed, and comforted her!

Madame Bouïsse, in the meantime, had gone into my bed-chamber, where she was sweeping, and singing to herself with the door three parts closed, believing, no doubt, that she was affording me the opportunity to make a formal declaration.

"Alas, mademoiselle," I said, hesitatingly, "could I have foreseen this——"

She rose, dashed the tears aside, and, holding out her hand to me, said kindly—

"It is no fault of yours, fellow-student, if I remind you of the portrait, or if the portrait reminds me of one whom it resembles still more nearly. I am sorry to have troubled your kind heart with my griefs. It is not often that they rise thus to the surface."

I raised her hand reverently to my lips.

"But you are looking worn and ill yourself," she added, scrutinisingly. "Is anything the matter?"

"Not now," I replied. "But—but I have gone through some painful scenes during the last twenty-four hours, and my nerves, I think, are somewhat shaken."

"Was this in your professional capacity?"

"Not exactly—and yet partly so. I have been more a looker on than an active agent—and I have witnessed a frightful death-scene."

She sighed, and shook her head.

"You ought not to be a surgeon, fellow-student," she said, compassionately. "Instead of prescribing for others, you need some one to prescribe for you. Why, your hand is quite feverish: you should at once go to bed, and keep quiet for the next twelve hours."

"I will, when Madame Bouïsse has put the room in order. But——"

"But what?"

"I must get up and go out again at six."

"Nay, that is in three hours!"

"I cannot help it. It is my duty."

"If it be your duty, I have nothing more to say. Would you drink some lemonade, if I made it for you?"

"I would drink poison, if it were of your mixing!" I exclaimed, fervently.

"A decidedly misplaced enthusiasm!" laughed she, and left the room.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

It was a glorious morning—the first morning of June—and I took my way, as usual, to Dr. Lucet's house in the Faubourg St. Germain. I had seen Oliphant off the night before, by the Orleans Railway, and, refreshed by some six or seven hours of good sleep, had started somewhat earlier, for the express purpose of taking a turn in the Luxembourg Gardens before beginning my day's work. There, the luxuriance of the blossoming parterres, the lavish perfume from geranium-bed and acacia-tree, and the mad singing of the little birds up among the boughs, set me longing for a holiday. Already the painful impressions of yesterday had begun to loose their hold upon my imagination. I thought of Normandene, and our sylvan wood-lands. I thought how pleasant it would be to go back to dear old England, if only for ten days, and surprise my father in his quiet study. Surely, this was by no means an unreasonable desire! I had worked hard of late, and I was somewhat tired and out of health. What if I asked Dr. Lucet to spare me for a fortnight?

Thinking thus, and phrasing over my request as I went, I left the gardens reluctantly, and, arrived at the Rue-de-Mont Parnasse, rang the great bell, crossed the dull courtyard, and took my usual seat at my usual desk, not nearly so well-disposed for work as usual.

"If you please, monsieur," said the solemn valet, making his appearance at the door, "Monsieur le Docteur requests your presence in his private room."

I went. Dr Lucet was standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, and his arms folded over his breast. An open letter bordered broadly with black lay upon his

desk. Although distant some two yards from the table, his eyes were fixed upon this paper. When I came in he looked up, pointed to a seat, and remained standing and silent.

"Stanton Leigh," said he, after a pause of some minutes, "I have this morning received a letter from England, by the early post."

"From my father, sir?" I exclaimed, eagerly.

"No. From a stranger." He looked straight at me as he said this, and hesitated.

"But it contains news," he added, "that—that much concern you."

There was a fixed gravity about the lines of his handsome mouth, and an unwonted embarrassment in his manner, that struck with a strange dismay.

"Good news, I—I hope, sir," I faltered.

"Bad news, my young friend," said he, compassionately. "News that you must try to meet like a man, with fortitude—with resignation. Your father—your excellent father, and my honoured friend——"

He pointed to the letter and turned away.

I rose up, sat down, rose up again, reached out a trembling hand for the letter, and read the loss that my heart had already presaged.

My father was dead!

Well as ever in the morning, he had been struck with apoplexy; in the afternoon, and died in a few hours. Unconscious from the moment of his seizure, he expired apparently without pain.

The letter was written by our old family lawyer, and concluded with the request that Dr. Lucet would "break the melancholy news to Mr. Stanton Leigh, in order that he might immediately return to England, for the funeral ceremonies."

My tears fell heavily, one by one, upon the open letter. I had loved my father tenderly, in my heart. His very roughnesses and eccentricities were dear to me. I could

not believe that he was dead. I could not believe that I should never see him more—never listen to his voice again! I was stunned, and had no power to move or speak. By and by Dr. Lucet came over, and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"Come, come," said he, gently but firmly, "you have much before you, and it is time you tried to think of what you must do before starting. The train leaves at mid-day, for Calais. It is now ten; you have only two hours left."

"My poor father!"

"Bernard," continued the doctor, taking no notice of my exclamation, "shall return with you to your lodgings and assist you with your preparations. As for money——"

He took out his pocket-book, and offered me a couple of bank notes; but I shook my head, and put them from me.

"I have enough, thank you," said, I with an effort to be calm, "good bye."

"Good bye," he replied, and offered me his hand. "You will write to me?"

I bowed my head in silence, and we parted. I found a cab at the door, and Bernard on the box. I was soon at home again. Home, indeed! I felt as if I had no home now, either in France or England—as if all my Paris life had been a dream, and this were the hideous waking. Naomie was out. It was one of her busy mornings, and she would not be back till the afternoon. It was very bitter to leave without one last look—one last word; I seized pen and paper, and yielding for the first time to all the impulses of my love, wrote, without weighing my words, these few brief sentences:—

"I have had a heavy loss, Naomie, and by the time you open this letter, I shall be far away. My father—my dear, good father—is no more. My mother died when I was a little child. I have no brothers—no sisters—no near relatives. I am alone in the world now—quite, quite alone. My last thought here is of you. If it seems strange to speak of love at such a moment, forgive me, for that love

is now my only hope. Oh that you were here, and would deign to strengthen me with one word—one look! Oh that I might press my lips to your hand at parting, and know that some of your thoughts went with me! I cannot believe that you are utterly indifferent to me; for I love you. Oh Naomië, how I love you! Only God, who reads my heart, can tell how true, how deep, how earnest, that love is! Only the stars know how I have, night after night, watched the light from your window, and blessed your very shadow when it crossed the blind!

“ Since I have known you, life has become earnest with me.

“ My sympathies are enlarged—my interest in art is intensified—my tastes, my habits of thought are refined and developed. It has seemed to me as if life had grown holier, and the very air purer, since I learned to love you. Only to know that you are there, in the adjoining chamber, is peace unutterable. When you speak, I listen to your voice, as to the voice of a Divinity walking in the Eden of my heart!

“ When I come back, I shall seek you, Naomië—seek you here, where I have loved you so long, so humbly, so passionately! I shall look into your eyes for my answer, and read in them all the joy, or all the despair of the life that lies before me. Yet, be that fiat what it may, I will bless you for it, Naomië, and love you with an unwearied love, to which, if ever sorrow or sickness should fall upon you, you may turn for comfort.

“ Adieu! most honoured, and most beloved. . . S. L.”

“ P. S.—I meant to have had that portrait copied again for you, because you saw in it a likeness to your father. Yet, take it, as my parting gift. It is the most precious thing that I possess, and to part from it thus is the utmost proof of my love.”

Once written, I dared not read my letter again. I thrust it under her door, and in less than five minutes afterwards was on my way to the station.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE FADING OF THE RAINBOW.

"I loved a love once, fairest among women ;  
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

LAMB.

BEAUTIFULLY and truly, in the fourth book of the most poetical of stories, has a New World romancist described the state of a sorrowing lover. "All around him," saith he, "seemed dreamy and vague; all within him, as in a sun's eclipse. As the moon, whether visible or invisible, has power over the tides of the ocean, so the face of that lady, whether present or absent, had power over the tides of his soul, both by day and night, both waking and sleeping. In every pale face and dark eye he saw a resemblance to her; and what the day denied him in reality, the night gave him in dreams."

Such was, very faithfully, my own condition of mind during the interval which succeeded my departure from Paris—the only difference being that Longfellow's hero was rejected by the woman he loved, and sorrowing for that rejection; whilst I, neither rejected nor accepted, mourned another grief, and through the tears of that trouble, looked forward anxiously to my uncertain future.

I arrived in Normandene the night before my father's funeral, and remained there for ten days. I found myself, to my surprise, almost a rich man—at all events sufficiently independent to follow my own inclinations in the future, and in no way compelled to rely upon my profession for resources. My first impulse, on learning the extent of my means, was to relinquish a career that had been from the first distasteful to me—my second was to leave the decision

to Naomie. To please her, to be worthy of her, to prove my devotion, was what I most desired upon earth. If she wished me to be useful and active, I would do my best to be so for her sake—if, on the contrary, she only cared to see me content, I would devote myself henceforth to that life of "retired leisure" that I had always coveted. Could man love more honestly and heartily?

One year had worked a marked difference in me. I had not observed it so much in Paris; but here, amid old scenes and old reminiscences, I seemed to meet the image of my former self, and wondered to see how changed I was. I left home a boy in experience, timid, ignorant of the world's usages, proud, reserved, silent, almost misanthropic. I came back strengthened mentally and physically. Studious as ever, I could yet contemplate actively without positive repugnance. I knew how to meet and treat my fellow-men; I was acquainted with society in its most refined and most homely phases. I had tasted of pleasure, of disappointment, love—of all that makes life earnest, and man complete.

As the time drew near when I should return to Paris, I became miserably nervous. Grief, and hope, and that strange reluctance which would fain defer the thing it most desires, perplexed and troubled me by day and night. Once again on the road, the past seemed more than ever dream-like, and Paris and Normandene became confused together in my mind, like the mingled outlines of two dissolving views.

My journey was rapidly achieved, and I reached the Cité Bergère in the midst of a warm and glowing afternoon. The great streets were crowded with carriages and foot-passengers. The trees were in their fullest leaf. The sun poured down on pavement and awning with almost tropical intensity. I dismissed my cab at the top of the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre, and went up to the house on foot. A flower-girl sat in the shade of the archway, tying up her flowers for the evening sale, and I purchased a cluster of white roses for Naomie as I went by.



Madame Bouïsse was sound asleep in her little sanctuary ; but my key hung in its old place, so I took it without disturbing her, and went up as if I had been away only a few hours. Arrived at the third storey, I stopped by her door and listened. All was very silent within. She was out, perhaps ; or writing quietly in the farther chamber. I resolved to leave my travelling bag in my own room, and then ring boldly for admittance. I turned the key, and found myself once again in my own familiar, pleasant, student home. The books and busts were there in their accustomed places, and everything as I had left it. Everything, except the picture ! The picture was gone ; so Naomie had accepted it !

Three letters awaited me on the table ; one from Dr. Lucet, written in a bold hand—a mere note of condolence : one from Oliphant, dated Chamouni : the third from Naomie. I knew it was from her. I knew that that small, clear, upright writing, so singularly distinct and regular, could be only hers. I had never seen it before ; but my heart identified it.

That letter contained my fate. I took it up, laid it down, paced backwards and forwards, and for several minutes dared not break the seal. At length I opened it. It ran thus :—

“ FRIEND, AND FELLOW-STUDENT,—I had hoped that a man such as you, and a woman such as I, might become true friends, and discuss books and projects, give and take the lesser services of life, and yet not end by loving. In this belief, despite occasional misgivings, I have suffered our intercourse to become intimacy—our acquaintance, friendship. I see now that I was mistaken, and I reproach myself for the consequence of that mistake, now, when it is, alas ! too late.

“ I can be nothing to you, friend. I have duties in life more sacred than marriage. I have a task to fulfil which is sterner than love, and imperative as fate. I do not say that to answer you thus costs me no pain. Were there even hope,

I would bid you hope ; but my labour presses heavily upon me, and repeated failure has left me weary and heart-sick.

" You tell me in your letter that by the time I read it, you will be far away. It is now my turn to repeat the same words. When you come back to your rooms, mine will be desolate. I shall be gone ; all I ask is, that you will not attempt to seek me.

" Farewell. I accept your gift. Perhaps I act selfishly in taking it, but a day may come when I shall dare to justify that selfishness to you. In the meantime, once again farewell. You are the only friend I have ever made, and these are the saddest words that I have written in my life. Forget me.

" NAOMIE."

I scarcely know how I felt, or what I did, after having read this letter. I believe that I stood for a long time stone still, incapable of realising the extent of my misfortune. By and by it seemed to rush upon me suddenly, like a tide of fire. I threw open my window, scaled the balcony rails, and forced my way into her rooms. Her rooms ! Ah, by that window she used to sit—at that table she read and wrote—in that bed she slept. All around and about were scattered evidences of her presence. Upon the chimney-piece lay an envelope addressed to her name—upon the floor, some fragments of torn paper, and some ends of cordage ! The very flowers were yet fresh upon her balcony ! The sight of these things, while they confirmed my despair, thawed the ice at my heart, and relieved the burning in my brain. I called upon her name, wildly—I threw myself on the floor in my great agony, and the hot, human rain came dropping, dropping through my fingers.

I cannot tell how long I may have lain there ; but it seemed like a lifetime. Long enough, at all events, to drink the bitter draught to the last drop—long enough to learn that life henceforth could have no grief in store for which I should weep again.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### TREATETH OF MANY THINGS ; BUT CHIEFLY OF BOOKS AND POETS.

THERE are times when this beautiful world seems to put on a mourning garb, as if sympathising, like a gentle mother, with the grief that is consuming us ; when the trees shake their arms in mute sorrow, and scatter their faded leaves like ashes on our heads ; when the slow rains weep down around us, and the very clouds look cold above. Then, like Hamlet the Dane, we take no pleasure in the life that weighs so wearily upon us, and deem

“ This goodly frame—the earth—a sterile promontory,  
And this brave, overhanging firmament, the air ;  
This majestical roof fretted with golden fire,  
A foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.”

So it was with me, in the heavy time that followed my return to Paris. I had lost everything in losing her. I had no aim in life—no occupation—no hope—no rest. The clouds had rolled between me and the sun, and wrapped me in their cold shadows, and all was dark about me. I felt that I could say with an old writer—“ For the world, I count it not an inn, but an hospital, and a place not to live, but to die in.”

Week after week I lingered in Paris, hoping against hope, and always seeking her. I had a haunting conviction that she was not far, and that if I only had strength to persevere, I must find her. Possessed by this fixed idea, I paced the sultry streets day after day throughout the burning months of June and July ; lingered at dusk and early morning about the gardens of the Luxembourg, and such other quiet places as she might frequent ; and, heedless alike

of fatigue, or heat, or tempest, traversed the dusty city over and over again from barrier to barrier, in every direction.

Could I but see her once more—once only! Could I but listen to her sweet voice, even though it bade me an eternal farewell! Could but lay my lips for the last, last time upon her dear hand, and see the tender pity in her eyes, and be comforted!

Seeking, waiting, sorrowing thus, I grew daily weaker and paler, scarcely conscious of my own failing strength, and indifferent to all things save one. In vain Dr. Lucet urged me to resume my studies. In vain Müller, ever cheerful and active, came continually to my lodgings, seeking to divert my thoughts into healthier channels. In vain I received letter after letter from Harold Oliphant, imploring me to follow him to Switzerland, where his wife had already joined him. I shut my ears to all alike. Study had grown hateful to me; Müller's cheerfulness jarred upon me; Oliphant was too happy for my companionship. Liberty to pursue my weary search, peace to brood over my sorrow, were all that I now asked. I had not yet come to that stage when sympathy grows precious.

So weeks went by, and August came, and a slow conviction of the utter hopelessness of my efforts dawned at last upon me. She was really gone. If she had been in Paris all this time pursuing her daily avocations, I must have surely found her. Where should I seek her next? What should I do with life, with time, with the future? I resolved, at all events, to relinquish medicine at once, and for ever. I wrote a brief letter of farewell to Dr. Lucet, and another to Müller, and returned to England. I will not dwell on this part of my narrative. Enough if I say that the necessary legal arrangements were settled as quickly as might be, and that I found myself an independent, but a most unhappy, man. Leaving an old servant in care of the solitary house which had been my birthplace, I then turned my back once more on Normandene, perhaps for years—

perhaps for ever—and in less than three weeks was again once on my way to the Continent.

The spirit of restlessness was now upon me. I had no home; I had no peace; and in the place of the sun there was darkness. So I went with the thorns around my brow, and the shadow of the cross upon my breast. I went to suffer—to endure—if possible, to forget. Oh, the grief of the soul which lives on in the night, and looks for no dawning! Oh, the weary weight that presses down the tired eyelids, and yet leaves them sleepless! Oh, the tide of alien faces, and the sickening remembrance of one, too dear, which we may never see again! I carried with me the antidote to every pleasure. In the midst of crowds, I was alone. In the midst of novelty, the one thought came, and made all stale to me. Like Dr. Doran, I dwelt with the image of my dead self at my side.

Thus for many, many months we journeyed together—I and my sorrow—and passed through fair and famous places, and saw the seasons change under new skies. To the quaint old Flemish cities, and the gothic Rhine—to the plains and passes of Spain—to the unfrequented valleys of the Tyrol, and the glacier-lands of Switzerland I went, but found not the forgetfulness I sought. As in Holbein's fresco the skeleton plays his part in every scene, so my trouble stalked beside me, drank of my cup, and sat grimly at my table. It was with me in Naples, and the orange groves of Sorrento. It met me amid the ruins of the Roman Forum. It travelled with me over the blue Mediterranean, and landed beside me on the shores of the Cyclades. Go where I would, it possessed and followed me, and brooded over my head, like the cloud that rested on the ark.

Thinking over this period of my life, I seem to be turning the leaves of a varied album, or wandering through a gallery of glowing landscapes; and yet all the time to be dreaming. Faces grown familiar for a few days, and never seen after—pictures photographed upon the memory in all their vividness—glimpses of cathedrals, of palaces, of

ruins, of sunset and storm, sea and shore, flit before me for a moment, and are gone like phantasmagoria.

And it was like phantasmagoria that they impressed me at the time. Nothing seemed real to me. Startled, now and then, into admiration or wonder, my apathy fell from me, like a garment, and my heart throbbed again, as of old. But this was seldom—so seldom that I could almost count the occasions when it happened.

Thus it was that travelling did me no heart-service. It enlarged my experience; it undoubtedly cultivated my taste; but it brought me neither rest, nor sympathy, nor consolation. On the contrary, it widened the gulf between me and my fellow-men. I formed no friendships. I kept up no correspondence. A sojourner in hotels, I became more and more withdrawn from all tender and social impulses; and almost forgot the very name of home. So strong a hold did this morbid love of self-isolation take upon me, that I left Florence on one occasion, after a stay of only three days, because I had seen the names of a Normandene family among the fashionable arrivals in the *Giornale Toscano*.

Three years went by thus—three springs—three vintages—three winters—and, weary of wandering, I began to ask myself "What next?" My old passion for books had, in the meantime, re-asserted itself, and I longed once more for quiet. I knew now that my pilgrimage was hopeless. I knew that I loved her ever; that I could never forget her; that although the first pangs were past, I yet must bear

"All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing;  
All the dull, deep pain, and constant anguish of patience!"

I reasoned with myself. I resolved to be stronger, at all events, to the calmer. Exhausted and world-worn, I turned in thought to my native village among the green hills—to my deserted home and the great solitary study, with its busts and bookshelves, and its vista of neglected garden. The rooms where my mother died, where my father wrote, where, as a boy, I dreamed and studied,

would at least have memories for me; memories which, though sad, would still be soothing.

Perhaps, silently underlying all these motives, I may at this time already have begun to entertain one other, which was not so much a motive as a hope—not so much a hope as a half-seen possibility. I had written verses from time to time all my life long, and of late they had come to me more abundantly than ever. At times they flowed in upon me like an irresistible tide; at others they ebbed away for weeks, and seemed as if gone for ever. It was a power over which I had no control, and sought to have none. I never tried to make verses; but, when the inspiration was upon me, I made them, as it were, in spite of myself. My desk was full of them in time—sonnets, scraps of songs, fragments of blank verse, attempts in all sorts of queer and rugged metres, hexameters, pentameters, Alexandrines, and so forth; with here and there, a dialogue out of an imaginary tragedy, or a translation from some Italian or German poet. This taste grew by degrees to be a rare and subtle pleasure to me. My rhymes became my companions, and when the interval of stagnation came, I was restless and lonely till it passed away.

At length there came a day—I was reclining, I remember, on a ledge of turf, looking over one of the Italian valleys of the Alps—when, startled by the wild beauty of a line that I had just pencilled, I asked myself for the first time—

“Am I also a poet?”

I had never dreamed of it, never thought of it, never even hoped it, till that moment. I had scribbled on, idly, carelessly, out of the facile impulse of the soul within me, correcting nothing; seldom even reading what I had written, after it was committed to paper. I had sometimes been pleased with a melodious cadence, or a felicitous idea—sometimes amused with my own flow of thought, and readiness of versification; but that I, simple Stanton Leigh, should be, after all, enriched with this splendid gift

of song—was it mad presumption, or were these things proof? I knew not; but, lying on the parched grass of the mountain-side, tried the question over in my mind this way and that till

“ My heart beat in my brain.”

How should I learn if my jewel were true or false? How know if this fair land of poesy just opening before me were indeed Eden, or only the mirage of my excited fancy—mere sunshine upon sand? We all write verses at some moment or other in our lives, even the most prosaic; some because they are happy, some because they are sad, some because the living fire of youth impels them, and they must be up and doing, let the work be what it may—

“ Many fervent souls.

Strike rhyme on rhyme, who would strike steel on steel,  
If steel had offer'd.”

Was this case mine? Was I fancying myself a poet, only because I was an idle man, and had lost the woman whom I loved? To answer these questions myself was impossible. They could only be answered by the public voice, and before I dared question that oracle I had much to do. I resolved to discipline myself to the harness of rhythm. I resolved to go back to the fathers of poetry—to graduate once again in Homer and Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. I promised myself that before I tried my new wings in the sun, I would be my own severest critic, and venture nothing, if a fall must come of it.

Once arrived at this determination, I felt happier than I had been for the past three years. I looked up to the mountain peaks, and my soul dilated within me.

“ I will be strong,” I said. “ I will be a loiterer and a dreamer no longer. Books have been my world. I have accepted all, and I have given nothing. Now I too will work, and prove that I was worthy of her; worthy even of her love!”

Going down, by and by, into the valley, I met a traveller trudging on before me, with a book in his hand. He was



a small, sallow, wiry Englishman, and wore a grey, loose coat, with two large pockets full of books. I had met him once before at Milan, and again in a steamer on the Lake of Lucerne. He was always reading. He read in the diligence—he read when he was walking—he read during dinner at the *table d'hôte*. He had a mania for reading; and might, in fact, be said to be bound up in his own library.

Meeting thus on the mountain, we bowed, and fell into conversation. My heart was full, and, feeling so much happier, I also felt more social than was my wont. He told me that he was on his way to Geneva, that he detested continental life, and that he was only waiting for certain letters before starting for England.

"But," said I, "you do not, perhaps, give continental life a fair trial. You are always absorbed in the pages of a book, and as for the scenery, you appear never to observe it."

"Dence take the scenery!" he exclaimed pettishly. "I never look at it. All scenery's alike. Trees, mountains, water—water, mountains, trees: the same thing over and over again, like the bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope. I read about the scenery, and that is quite enough for me.

"But books cannot paint the lakes of Switzerland, or the sunsets of the Alps," said I; "and, when one is on the spot—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted the traveller in grey. "Everything is much pleasanter in books than in reality—travelling especially. There are no bad smells in books. There are no long bills in books. Above all, there are no mosquitoes. Travelling is the greatest mistake in the world, and I am going home as fast as I can."

"And henceforth, I suppose, your travels will be confined to your library," I observed, smiling.

"Exactly so. Like Hazlitt, I may say that 'food, warmth, sleep, and a book are all I require.' With those I may make the tour of the world, and incur neither fatigue nor danger."

"And books, after all, are our first friends," I rejoined with a sigh.

"And our last, sir," added the traveller. "I have no others. I wish for no others. I have confidence in no others."

"At all events," said I, "they are ever true and faithful."

"Sir," said the traveller, waving his hand somewhat theatrically, "books are the only friends on which a wise man can depend. They are always wise, and they are always witty. They never intrude upon us when we desire to be alone. They never speak ill of us behind our backs. They are never capricious, and never surly; neither are they, like some clever folks, pertinaciously silent when we most wish them to shine. Did Shakespeare ever refuse his best thoughts to us, or Montaigne decline to be companionable? Did you ever find Molière dull? or Lamb prosy? or Scott unentertaining?"

"You remind me," said I, laughing, "of the student in Chaucer, who desired for his only pleasure and society,

—" at his bedde's head  
A twenty bokes clothed in black and red,  
Of Aristotle and his philosophy !"

"Aye, but he preferred them expressly to 'robes riche, or fidel or sautrie,' whereas, I prefer them to men and women, and to Aristotle and his philosophy, into the bargain !"

"Your philosophy, at least, is admirable," said I. "For many a year—I might almost say for most years of my life—I have been a disciple in the same school."

"Sir, you cannot belong to a better. Think of the convenience of always carrying half a dozen intimate friends in your pocket ! Good afternoon."

We had now come to a point where two paths diverged, and the reading traveller, always economical of time, opened his book where he had last turned down his leaf, and disappeared.

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I never saw him again ; but his theory amused me, and, as trifles will sometimes do in even the gravest matters, decided me. So the result of all my hopes and reflections was that I went back to England, and to the student life that had been the dream of my youth. Surely it is Wordsworth who says that

“ ‘ Dreams, books, are each a world ; and books, we know,  
Are a substantial world, both pure and good.’ ”

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### MY BIRTHDAY.

THREE years of travelling abroad, and five of retirement at home, brought my twenty-ninth birthday. I was still young, it is true ; but oh, how changed from that sweet prime of earliest manhood, when I used to play the Romeo at midnight to Naomie upon her balcony ! I looked at myself in a glass that morning, and steadily contemplated the wearied, bronzed, and bearded face, which

——“sear'd by toil and something touch'd by time,”

then gave me back glance for glance. I looked older than my age by many years. My eyes had grown grave with a steadfast melancholy ; and streaks of premature silver were mingled here and there in the still abundant hair which had been the solitary vanity of my youth.

“Is she also thus changed and faded ?” I asked myself, as I turned away. And then I sighed to think that if we met she might not know me.

For I loved her still, worshipped her, and raised altars to her in the dusky chambers of my memory. My whole soul was dedicated to her. My best thoughts were hers. My poems, my ambition, my hours of labour, all were hers by right, and hers only ! I knew now that no time could change the love which had so changed me ; or dim the sweet remembrance of that face which I carried for ever at my heart, like an amulet. Other women might be fair, but my eyes never dwelt upon them—other voices might be sweet, but my ear never listened to them—other hands might be soft, but my lips never sought them. She was the only woman in all my world—the only star in all my night—the one Eve of my ruined Paradise. In a word, I

loved her, and loved her, I think, more dearly than before  
I lost her—

“Love is not love  
Which alters, when it alteration finds  
Or bends with the remover to remove :  
O no ! it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.”

I had received a packet by the post that birthday morning, and feeling restless in the house, went out to read it in some green solitude ; for it contained some London papers and reviews, which, for a foolish reason of my own, I almost dreaded to open. So I went away, and roamed for hours among the lonely hills and tracts of furzy common that extend for miles and miles around my native place. The purple heather was all a-bloom along the slopes of the hill sides. The golden sand-cliffs glittered in the sun. The great fir-woods reached away over height and through valley—“grand and spiritual trees,” pointing ever upward with warning finger, like the Apostles in the old Italian pictures. Now I passed a solitary farm-yard, where the busy labourers were piling the latest stacks ; and now a group of happy children, gathering wild nuts and blackberries. By and by, I came upon a great common, with a picturesque mill standing high against the sky. All around lay a vast prospect of woodland and tufted heath, bounded far off by a range of chalk hills, speckled with villages, dotted over with farm-houses, lit up here and there by gleams of a winding river, and melting towards the west into a distance faint and far, and mystic, as the horizon of one of Turner’s landscapes.

Here I threw myself on the green turf and rested. Truly, Nature is a great “physician of souls.” The peace of the place descended into my heart, and hushed for awhile the voice of its repinings. The delicious air, the living silence of the woods, the dreamy influences of the autumnal sunshine, all alike served to lull me away into a pleasant mood neither gay nor sad, but very calm—

calm enough for the purpose for which I had come. So I brought out my packet of papers, and, unfolding the first with a hand that not all my philosophy could nerve to perfect steadiness, met my own name upon the second page. For it was, as I had anticipated, a *critique* on my first volume of poems.

Indifference to criticism, if genuine, and based upon a simple consciousness of moral right, is a fine and noble thing. It implies principle, courage, modesty, and all the heroic virtues. But indifference to criticism, taken in its ordinary, and especially its literary sense, is generally a very small thing, and resolves itself for the most part, into a halting and one-sided kind of stoicism, meaning indifference to blame or ridicule, and never indifference to praise. It is very convenient to the disappointed authorling; very effective in the established writer; but mere vanity at the root of it, and equally contemptible in both. For my part, I confess that I came to my trial as tremblingly as any poor caitiff to the fiery ordeal, and finding myself miraculously clear of the burning ploughshares, was quite as full of wonder and thankfulness at my good fortune. For I found my purposes appreciated, and my best thoughts understood; not, it is true, without some dispraise, yet dispraise tempered with such encouragement that I drew from it more of hope than despondency—more of pride than disappointment. And then I thought of Naomie, and, picturing to myself all the joy that it would have been to lay these things at her feet, I turned my face to the grass, and wept like a child.

Then, one by one, the ghosts of my dead hopes rose out of the grave of the past and vanished “into thin air” before me; and in their place came high thoughts and earnest aspirations, born of the man’s strong will. I resolved to use wisely the gifts that were mine—to sing well the song that had risen to my lips—to “seize the spirit of my time,” and turn to noble ends the God-given weapons of the poet. So should I be worthier of her remembrance, if she yet re-

membered me—worthier, at all events, to remember her. Thus the hours ebbed away, and to the storm of feeling succeeded a deep calm. When I rose up at length and turned my face towards home, the golden day was bending westward, and my shadow travelled before me along the road—wherein I was more fortunate than the man in the German story, who sold his to the devil.

It was quite dusk by the time I gained the outskirts of the town, and I reflected with much contentment upon the prospect of a cosy bachelor dinner, and, after dinner, lamp-light, and a book.

"If you please, sir," said Collins, "a lady has been here."

Collins had been my father's servant when I was a boy at home, and was now a grave, married man, with hair fast whitening.

"A lady?" I echoed. "One of my cousins, I suppose, from Effingham."

"No, sir," said Collins. "She was a strange lady, sir, and a foreigner."

A stranger and a foreigner! I felt my whole frame shaken from head to foot.

"Her name?" I said huskily. "She—she left her name?"

Collins raised his eyebrows in deferential surprise.

"Lady left her card, sir," he replied. "It lies beside your plate."

"I snatched it up with trembling fingers, and read—

MADemoiselle DE BEAUREPAIRE.

I dropped the card, with a sigh of profound disappointment.

"At what time did this lady call, Collins?" I asked, moodily.

"Not very long after you left the house, sir. She said she would call again. She is at the White Horse."

"I shall not give her the trouble of coming here," said I, drawing my chair up to the table. "Send up to the

White Horse with my compliments, and say that I will wait upon the lady in about an hour's time."

Hereupon Collins darted away to despatch the message, and returning presently with the pale ale, uncorked it dexterously, and stood at the side-board, serenely indifferent.

"And what kind of person was this—this Mademoiselle de Beaurepaire, Collins?" I asked, leisurely bisecting a partridge.

"Can't say, sir, indeed. Lady kept her veil down."

"Humph! Tall or short, Collins?"

"Rather tall, sir."

"Young?"

"Havn't an idea, sir. Voice very pleasant, though."

A pleasant voice has always a certain attraction for me, whether in man or woman. Naomie's voice was exquisite—rich, and low, and somewhat deeper than the voices of most women.

I took up the card again. Mademoiselle de Beaurepaire! Where had I heard that name?

"She said nothing of the nature of her business, I suppose, Collins?"

"Nothing at all, sir. Dear me, sir, I beg pardon for not mentioning it before; but there's been a messenger over twice from the White Horse, since the lady left, to know if you were yet home."

"Then she is in haste?"

"Very uncommon haste, I should say, sir," replied Collins, deliberately.

I pushed back the untasted dish, and rose directly. A strange anxiety—a dread—a presentiment, perhaps, had taken possession of me.

"You should have told me this before," I said, hastily.

"But—but surely, sir, you will dine—"

"I will wait for nothing," I interrupted. "I'll go at once. Had I known that the lady's business was urgent, I would not have delayed a moment."

Collins cast a mournful glance at the table, and sighed



respectfully. Before he had recovered from his amazement, I was half way to the inn.

The White Horse was now the leading hostelry of Normandene. The old Red Lion was no more. Its former host and hostess were dead ; a brewery occupied its site ; and the White Horse was kept by a portly Boniface, who had been head waiter under the extinct dynasty. But there had been many changes in Normandene since my boyish days, and this was one of the least among them.

I was shown into the best sitting room, preceded by a smart waiter in a white neckcloth. At a glance I took in all the bearings of the scene—the table with its untasted dessert; the shaded lamp; the closed curtains of red damask; the thoughtful figure in the easy chair ; the attendant embroidering at the farther side of the table. Although the weather was yet warm, a fire blazed in the grate ; but the windows were open behind the crimson curtains, and the evening air stole gently in. It was like stepping into a picture by Gerard Dow, so closed, so glowing, so rich in colour, and so wintry.

“ Mr. Leigh,” said the smart waiter, flinging the door very wide open, and lingering to see what might follow.

The lady rose slowly, bowed, waved her hand towards a chair at some distance from her own, and resumed her seat. The attendant left the room, followed reluctantly by the waiter.

“ I have to apologise, sir, for this demand upon your time ; but I had not intended to give you the trouble of calling upon me,” said Mademoiselle de Beaurepaire, using her fan as a handscreen, and speaking in a low, and somewhat constrained voice.

I could not see her features for the double shadow which fell upon them ; but something in her accent startled the pulsations of my heart.”

“ Madam,” I replied, “ the service is too trifling to admit of an apology.”

She bowed again, and I fancied that I saw her hand tremble.

"However trifling to you, sir," she said, "this interview may prove exceedingly important to me. You are a native of this town?"

"I am, madam."

"Were you here in the year 18—?"

"I was."

"Will you give me leave to put your memory to the test respecting certain events which took place about that time?"

"In any respect, madam, that I can aid you, command me."

Mademoiselle de Beaurepaire thanked me with a gesture, withdrew her chair still farther from the radius of the lamp and the fire, and said:—

"I must entreat your patience if I first weary you with one or two particulars of a family history."

"Madam, I listen."

During the brief pause that ensued, I tried vainly to distinguish something more of her features. I could only trace the outline of a slight and graceful figure, the contour of a very slender hand, and the ample folds of a dark silk dress.

At length, in a tone, lower and graver than ever, she began—

"Not to impose upon you any dull genealogical details," she said, "I will commence by telling you that the family of De Beaurepaire is one of the oldest of the old French *noblesse*, and that my grandfather was the last Marquis who bore the title. "Holding large possessions in the *comtal* of Pennaissin (a district which now forms part of the department of Vaucluse) and other demesnes at Montlehéry in the department of the Isle of France——"

"At Montlehéry!" I exclaimed, suddenly recovering the lost link in my memory.

———"The De Beaurepaires," continued the lady, without pausing to notice my interruption, "were sufficiently wealthy to maintain their rank and social dignity, and to contract alliances with many of the best families in the south

of France. Towards the early part of the reign of Louis XIII. they began to be conspicuous at court, and continued to reside in and near Paris up to the period of the Revolution. Marshals and Constables of France, Ambassadors, and Ministers of State, during a period of nearly a century and a half, the De Beaurepaires had enjoyed too many honours not to be among the first of those who fell before the popular vengeance in the Reign of Terror. My grandfather, who, as I have already said, was the last Marquis bearing the title, was seized with his wife and daughter in the retirement of his Chateau near Montlehéry, in the spring-time of 1793, and incarcerated in the prison of La Force. Thence, after a mock trial, they were all three conveyed to execution, and publicly guillotined on the sixth of June, in the same year. Do you follow me ? ”

“ Perfectly, madam.”

“ One survivor, however, remained in the person of Charles Armand Prevot de Beaurepaire, only son of the Marquis, then a youth of seventeen years of age, and happily at that time pursuing his studies in the seclusion of an old chateau in Vaucluse. Warned of the fate of his family, he fled into Italy. In the meantime all his inheritance was confiscated—lands, jewels, titles, everything ; and the last representative of the race, proud even in exile, assumed another name. It were idle to attempt to trace out his life through the years that followed. He wandered from land to land ; lived none knew how ; became a tutor, a miniature painter, a volunteer at Naples under General Pepe, a teacher of languages in London, corrector of the press to a publishing house in Brussels : everything or anything, in short, by which he could honourably earn his bread. During these years of toil and poverty, he married. The lady was an orphan of Scotch extraction, poor and proud as himself, and governess in a school in Brussels. They were very happy ; but their happiness lasted only three years. She died in the third summer of their union, and left him with one only little daughter. This child became henceforth his only

care and comfort. While she was yet a mere infant, he placed her in the school where her mother had been teacher. There she remained, first as pupil, by and by as governess, for more than sixteen years. The child was called by a quaint old family name that had been her grandmother's and her great-grandmother's in the high and palmy days of the De Beaurepaires—Naomie."

"Naomie?" I cried, rising from my chair.

"It is not a common name," said the lady. "Does it surprise you?"

"I—I beg your pardon, madam," I stammered, in great agitation. "I—I once had a dear friend so named. Pray continue."

"For ten years the refugee contrived to scrape together sufficient to keep his little Naomie in the safe and pleasant shelter of her Flemish home. He led a wandering life, no one knew where; and earned his money, no one knew how. Travel-worn and careworn, he was prematurely aged, and at fifty might well have been mistaken for a man of sixty-five or seventy. Poor, and broken as he was, however, his bearing was ever that of a true gentleman, and the little girl was proud of him when he came to see her. That event, however, seldom took place oftener than once in every six or seven months. When she saw him for the last time, Naomie was about thirteen years of age. He looked paler and thinner, and poorer than ever, and bade her farewell, as if with the presentiment that they should meet no more. Acting upon this presentiment, he told her, for the first and only time, much of his sad history, and left with her a strange and touching gift. It was his old court sword—the badge of his nobility. She kept it in her chamber ever after, loved it as a sacred relic, and would sooner part with life than lose it even now."

The lady's voice faltered for a moment from its steadfast gravity, and she pressed her hand upon her brow. I subdued myself. I neither spoke nor stirred, but sat like a man of stone. Presently she resumed her narrative.

“ The father never came again. The child, now scarcely a child, finding herself, after a certain length of time, thrown upon the charity of her former instructors, was glad to become under-teacher in their school. The rest of her history may be told in few words. From under-teacher she became head-teacher, and at nineteen passed as governess into a private family. At twenty-one she removed to Paris, and set foot for the first time in the land of her fathers. All was now changed in France. The Bourbons reigned, and her father, had he but reappeared, might possibly have reclaimed some of his former possessions. She sought him far and near. She employed agents to discover him. She could not, would not, believe that he was no more. To be once again clasped in his arms—to bring him back to his native country—to behold him resuming his noble name; this was the bright dream of her life. To accomplish these things she laboured in many ways, teaching, and writing; for Naomie also was proud—too proud to put forth an unsupported claim. For with the father were lost the title-deeds and papers which might have made the daughter wealthy, and she had no proofs to show for her nobility. Still she laboured heartily, lived poorly, and earned enough to push her enquiries far and wide—even to journey hither and thither, where she fancied, alas ! that a clue had been found. Twice she travelled into Switzerland, and once into Italy, but always in vain ! The exile had too well concealed his *soubriquet* and his calling, and Naomie grew heart-sick, and weary of failure. One fact, however, she succeeded in discovering, and only one—namely, that her father had, many years before, made some attempt to establish his claim to the estates of De Beaurepaire, but failed for want either of sufficient proof, or means to carry on the *procès*. Of even this circumstance only a meagre law record remained, and she learned nothing farther. Since then, a claim has been put forth by a remote branch of the De Beaurepaire family, and the estate is, even now, in course of litigation.”

She paused, as if fatigued by so long talking; but, seeing me about to speak, prevented me with a gesture of the hand, and resumed—

“Naomie De Beaurepaire continued to live in Paris for nearly three years, winning there some money, and some honours; after which she left it to seek out the members of her mother’s family, and, finding them kindly disposed towards her, took up her abode amongst them in the calm seclusion of a remote Scotch town. There, even there, she still hoped, still employed agents, still yearned to discover, if not her father, at least her father’s grave. Seven years passed thus. She continued to labour with her pen, earning a modest subsistence; till at length the death of one of these relatives left her mistress of a modest inheritance. Money was welcome, since it enabled her to pursue her life’s task with renewed vigour. She searched farther and deeper. A trivial circumstance eagerly followed up, brought a train of other circumstances to light. She discovered that her father had assumed a certain name; she found that the bearer of this name was a wandering man, a conjuror by trade; she pursued the vague traces of his progress from town to town, from county to county, sometimes losing, sometimes regaining the scattered links. Sir, he was my father—I am that Naomie. I have spent my life in this search—I have lived only for this hope. I have tracked his footsteps here—here to Normandene, and here all traces end. Oh, tell me, tell me, if—if you remember—.”

Calm and grave at first, she had risen now, and her voice died away in sobs. The firelight fell full upon her face—upon the face of my lost love.

I could control myself no longer, I stood up before her, flushed and vehement.

“Oh, Naomie!” I cried, “do you not know me? Do you not know that he who stood beside your father in his dying moments, and he who so loved you years ago, are one and the same? Alas! Why did you not then tell me

all these things? Why did you not love me? Why did you not confide in me?"

She grasped her chair convulsively with one hand, and pressed the other to her heart.

"I know you," she said. "I knew you from the first. I had even expected to see you, when they told me your name, and bade me inquire for you here! Did you stand beside my father's death-bed?"

"I did."

She clasped her hands over her eyes, and shuddered, as if beneath the pressure of a great physical pain.

"Oh, God!" she murmured, "sixteen years of denial and suffering! Sixteen years of darkness that might have been dispelled by a word!"

We were both silent for a long time. Then I led her to her chair, and told her all that I remembered of her father; how he came to Normandene—how, stricken suddenly, he fell even in the midst of his performance—how he died, and was buried. It was a melancholy recital, painful for me to relate—painful for her to hear—and interrupted over and over again by questions and tears, and bursts of unavailing sorrow.

"We will visit his grave to-morrow, Naomie," I said, when all was told.

She bent her head in token of acknowledgment.

"To-morrow, then," said she, "I end the pilgrimage of years."

"And—and afterwards?" I faltered.

"Afterwards? Alas! friend, when the hopes of years fall suddenly to dust and ashes, one feels almost as if there were no future to follow?"

"It is true," I said gloomily. "I know it only too well."

"You know it?" she exclaimed, looking up.

"I know it, Naomie. There was a moment in which all the hope, and fulness, and glory of my life went down at a blow. Have you not heard of ships that have gone to the bottom with all sail set, and every hand on board?"

She looked at me with a searching earnestness in her eyes, and sighed heavily.

"What have you been doing all this long time, fellow-student?" she asked after a pause.

The old name sounded very sweet upon her lips!

"I? Alas!—nothing."

"But you are a surgeon, are you not?"

"No. I never even went up for examination. When my father died, I had no longer an inducement to follow up studies in which I had never taken pleasure."

"What are you, then?"

"An idler upon the great high-way—a book-dreamer—a library fixture."

Naomie looked at me thoughtfully, with her cheek resting on her hand.

"Have you done nothing but read and dream?" she asked, reproachfully.

"Not quite. I have travelled."

"With what object?"

"A purely personal one. I was alone, and unhappy, and——"

"And fancied that purposeless wandering was a better cure than healthy labour. It is a common error. Well, you have travelled, and you have read books. What more?"

"Nothing more, except ——"

"Except what?"

I chanced to have one of the papers in my pocket, and so drew it out, and placed it before her.

"I have been a rhymist as well as a dreamer," I said, shyly. "Perhaps the rhymes grew out of the dreams, as the dreams themselves grew out of something else which has been underlying my very life this many a year. At all events, I have hewn a few of them into shape, and trusted them to paper and type—and here is a *critique* which came to me this morning with some three or four others."

She took the paper with a smile half of wonder, half of kindness, and, glancing quickly through it, said—



"This is well. This is very well. I must read the book. Will you lend it to me?"

"I will give it to you," I replied; "if I can give that which is already yours."

"Already mine?"

"Yes, as the poet in me, however worthless, is all and only yours! Do you suppose, Naomie, that I have ever ceased to love you! Do you suppose that I have been a wanderer and a recluse through anything but that love which so over-mastered me, that, losing you, I became as a stranger among my fellowmen. As my songs are born of my sorrow, so my sorrow was born of my love; and love, and sorrow, and song, such as they are, are of your making."

"Hush!" said she, with something of her old gay indifference. "I cannot suffer you to charge all your sins upon me, fellow-student! I have enough of my own to answer for—especially in the committing of rhymes! Besides, I am not going to acquit you so easily as you suppose. Granted that you have written a little book of poetry—what then? Have you done nothing else? Nothing active? Nothing manly? Nothing useful?"

"If by usefulness you mean manual labour," I replied, with some little impatience, "I certainly must plead guilty. I have neither felled a tree, nor ploughed a field, nor hammered a horse-shoe. I have lived by thought alone."

"A pleasant profession, more easy than profitable," said Naomie, smiling. "Are you married?"

"Married!" I echoed, indignantly. "How can you suppose it?"

"You are not a magistrate?"

"Certainly not."

"Do you hold any rank in the militia?"

"None, whatever."

"In short, then," said she, "you are perfectly useless. You play no part, domestic or public. You serve neither the state nor the community. You are a mere cypher—a

make-weight in the social scale—an article of no value to any one except the owner.”

“Not even the latter, mademoiselle,” I replied, bitterly. “It is long since I have ceased to value my own life.”

She smiled again, but her eyes this time were full of tears.

“Nay,” said she, softly, “am not I the owner?”

I fell at her feet.

“For God’s sake, do not mock me, Naomie!” I said. “I cannot bear it.”

She bent over me, so low that I felt her warm breath on my cheek. “I do not mock you,” she whispered. “I love you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Great joys at first affect us like great griefs. We are stunned by them, and know not how deep they are till the night comes with its solemn stillness, and we are alone with our own hearts. Then comes the season of thankfulness, and wonder, and joy, too rich for words. Then our souls rise up within us, and chant a hymn of praise; and the great vault of heaven is like the roof of a mighty cathedral studded with mosaics of golden stars; and the night winds join in with the bass of their mighty organ-pipes; and the poplars rustle, like the leaves of the hymn-books in the hands of the congregation. So it was with me that evening when I went forth into the quiet fields, where the summer moon was shining, and knew that Naomie was mine now and for ever—mine only! Bewildered and restless with my happiness, I wandered about for hours. I could not go home. I felt that I must breathe the open air of the hills, and tread the dew under my feet, and worship the giver of all this joy after my own wild fashion. At length, as the dawning light came widening up the East, I turned my steps homewards, and before the sun had risen above the farthest pine ridge, was sleeping the sweetest sleep that I had known for years.

The conjuror's grave was green with grass and purple with wild thyme when Naomie knelt beside it, and there consummated the weary pilgrimage of half a life. The sapling willow had spread its arms above him in a pleasant canopy, leaning farther and reaching higher, year by year.

"And lo! the twig to which they laid his head had now become a tree!"

The initials of his assumed name were obscured by the yellow lichen that grows on gravestones, and there were children playing at hide-and-seek in and out of the mounds all round about.

Naomie found nothing of her father but this grave. Papers and title-deeds there were none.

"I well remembered the anxious search made sixteen years ago, when not even a card was found to indicate the whereabouts of his friends or family. Not to lose the vestige of a chance, we pushed enquiry farther; but in vain. Our rector, now a decrepid old man, remembered nothing of the wandering lecturer. Mine host and hostess of the Red Lion were both dead. The Red Lion itself had disappeared, and become a thing of tradition. All was lost and forgotten; and of her hereditary wealth, station, "titles, honours, and promotions," Naomie de Beaurepaire retained nothing but her father's sword, and her ancestral name.

——Not even the latter, for many weeks,—oh discerning readers!—for before the golden harvest was gathered in, we two were married.

## CHAPTER XL.

BRINGETH THIS TRUE STORY TO AN END.

"Ye who have traced the pilgrim to the scene  
Which is his last, if in your memories dwell  
A thought that once was his, if on ye swell  
A single recollection, not in vain  
He wore his sandal-shoon and scallop-shell."

BYRON.

HAVING related the story of my life as it happened, incident by incident, and brought it down to that point at which stories are wont to end, I find that I have but little to add respecting others. Although myself "No Hero" either in act or pretension, my narrative has been purely personal. The evident reason is, that my social ties have been so few. The one love of my life was Naomie—the one friend of my life, Harold Oliphant. The catalogue of my acquaintances would scarcely number so many names as I have fingers on one hand. The two first are still mine; the latter, having been brought forward only in so far as they re-acted upon my feelings or modified my experiences, have become, for the most part, mere memories, and so vanish, ghost-like, from the page. Franz Müller is studying in Rome, having carried off a prize at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, which entitles him to three years at the Villa Medici—the Ultima Thule of the art-student's ambition. I hear that he is as full of whim and jest as ever, and the very life of the Café Greco. May I some day hear his pleasant laugh again! Dr. Lucet, I believe, is still practising in Paris; and Monsieur de Longueville, I have no doubt, continues to exercise the profession of Chevalier d'Industrie, with such failures and successes as are incidental to that career.

As for my early *amourettes*, they have disappeared from my path as utterly as though they had never crossed it.

Of Madame de Launay, I have neither heard, nor desired to hear, more. Even Celestine's pretty face is fast fading from my memory. It is ever thus with the transient passions of our *premiere jeunesse*. We believe in them for the moment, and waste laughter and tears, chaplets and sackcloth upon them. Presently the delusion passes; the earnest heart within us is awakened, and we know that till now we have been mere actors in "a masquerade of dreams." The chaplets were made of artificial flowers, after all. The funeral was a mock funeral—the banquet, a stage feast of painted fruits and empty goblets! Alas! we cannot survive that foolish past. We may only open to blot it out with after records of high, and wise, had tender things. Thus it is that the young man's heart is like the precious psalmists of old. He first of all defiles it with idle anacreontics in praise of love and wine; but, erasing these by and by, with his own pious hand, he writes it over afresh with chronicles of a pure and holy passion, and dedicates it to the fair saint of all his orisons.

Olipphant and his wife are now settled in Italy, having purchased a villa in the neighbourhood of Spezzia, where they live in great retirement. For this retirement they are influenced by more than one good reason. In the first place, the death of the Vicomte de Marly was an event likely to be productive of many unpleasant consequences to one who had deprived the French Government of so distinguished an officer. In the next, Olipphant is but a poor man, according to his own estimate, and his wife is no longer rich; so that Italy agrees with their means as well as with their tastes. Lastly, they love each other so well that they never weary of their solitude, nor care to barter away their blue Italian skies and solemn pine-woods for the glittering discomfort and feverish unrest of the crowd—Society.

Fascinated by Olipphant's description of his villa and the life he led in it, Naomie and I made up our minds, some few weeks after our marriage, to visit that part of Italy—perhaps, in case we were much pleased with it, to settle

there, for at least a few years. So I prepared once more to leave my father's house ; this time to let it, for I knew that I should never live in it again.

It took a week or two to clear the old place out. The thing was necessary ; yet I felt at the time as if it were a kind of sacrilege. To disturb the old dust upon the library shelves, and select such books as I cared to keep ; to sort and destroy all kinds of hoarded papers ; to ransack desks that had never been unlocked since the hands that last closed them up were laid to rest for ever, constituted my share of the work. Naomie superintended all the rest. As to the household goods, we resolved to keep none of them, excepting a few old family portraits, and my father's plate, some of which had descended to us through two or three centuries.

While yet in this unsettled state, with the house all in confusion, and the time appointed for our journey drawing nearer day by day, a strange thing happened.

At the end of the garden, encroaching partly upon a corner of it, and opening into the lane that bounded it on the other side of the hedge, stood the stable belonging to the house.

It had been put to no use since my father's time, and was now so thoroughly out of repair that I resolved to have it pulled down and rebuilt before letting the house to strangers. In the meantime, I went down one morning, with a workman, to see in what condition the place might be.

We had some little difficulty to force an entrance, for the lock and the hinges were rusted, and the floor within was choked with fallen rubbish. This difficulty overcome, I thought I had never seen a more dreary interior. My father's old chaise was yet standing there, with both wheels off. His old harness was dropping to pieces on the walls. The glass was broken in the narrow window. The beams were festooned with cobwebs. The very ladder leading to the loft above was so rotten that I scarcely dared trust to it for a footing. Having trusted to it, how-

ever, without accident, I found myself in a still more ruinous place than before. The posts supporting the roof were insecure; the tiles were all displaced overhead; and the rafters showed black and bare against the sky in many places. In one corner lay a heap of mouldy straw, and at the farther end seen dimly through the darkness, a pile of old lumber, and——by heaven! the pagoda-shaped canopy of many colours, and the little Chevalier's Conjuring Table!

I could scarcely believe my own eyes. My poor Naomie! Here, at last, were some relics of her father; but found in how strange a place, and by how strange a chance!

I had them pulled forward into the light, all mildewed and cobwebbed as they were; whereupon an army of spiders rushed out in every direction, and a bat rose up, shrieking, and whirled in blind circles overhead. In a corner of the pagoda we found an empty bird's-nest. The table was small, and could be got out without much difficulty; so I helped the workman to carry it down the ladder, and, sending it on before me to the house, sauntered back through the glancing shadows of the acacia-leaves, musing upon the manner in which these long-forgotten things had been brought to light, and wondering how they ever came to be stored away in my own stable.

"Do you know anything about it, Collins?" I said, coming up suddenly behind him in the hall.

"About what, sir?" asked that respectable servant, looking round with some perplexity, as if in search of the nominative.

I pointed to the table, now being carried into the dining-room.

Collins smiled—he had a remarkably civil, apologetic way of smiling behind his hand, as if it were a yawn, or a liberty

"Oh, sir," said he, "don't you remember—to be sure, you were quite a young gentleman at that time—but—"

"But what?" I interrupted impatiently.

"Why, sir, that table once belonged to a poor little conjuring chap who called himself Almond Pudding, and died——"

I checked him with a gesture.

"I know all that," I said hastily. "I remember it perfectly; but how came the things in my stable?"

"Your respected father and my honoured master, sir, had them conveyed there when the Red Lion was sold off," replied Collins, with a sidelong glance at the dining-room door. "He was of opinion, sir, that they might some day identify the poor man to his relatives, in case of enquiry."

I heard the sound of a suppressed sob, and, brushing past him without another word, went in and closed the door.

"My own Naomie!" I said, taking her in my arms. "My wife!"

Pale and tearful, she lifted her face from my shoulder, and pointed to the table.

"I know what it is," she faltered. "You need not tell me. My heart told me at once!—at once!" I led her to a chair, and explained how and where it had been found. I even told her of the little empty nest from which the young birds had long since flown away. In this tiny incident there was something pathetic that soothed her; so, presently, when she left off weeping, we examined the table together with much interest and curiosity.

It was a quaint, fragile, rickety thing, with slender twisted legs of black wood, and a cloth-covered top, that had once been green, but now retained scarce a vestige of its original colour. This cloth top was marked all over in slender slits of various shapes and sizes, round, square, hexagonal, and so forth, which, being pressed with the finger, fell inwards and disclosed little hiding-places sunk in the well of the table; but which, as soon as the pressure was removed, flew up again by means of concealed springs, and closed as accurately as before.



"This is strange," said Naomie, peering into one of the recesses.

"I have found something in the table! Look—it is a watch!"

I snatched it from her, and carried it to the window. Blackened and discoloured as it was, I recognised it instantly. It was my own watch—my own watch of which I was so boyishly vain years and years ago, and which I had lost so unaccountably on the night of the Chevalier's performance!

There were my initials engraved on the back, amid a forest of flourishes, and there on the dial was that identical little Cupid with the cornucopia of flowers, which I once thought such a miracle of workmanship! Alas! what a mighty march old Time had stolen upon me, while that little watch was standing still!

"Oh, heaven! oh, husband!"

Startled from my reverie more by the tone than the words, I turned and saw Naomie with a packet of papers in her hand—old, yellow, dusty papers, tied together by a piece of black ribbon.

"I found them there—there!" she gasped, pointing to a drawer in the table, which I now saw for the first time. "I chanced to press that little knob, and the drawer flew out. Oh, my father! my father!"

"What is the matter?" I exclaimed, my heart beating, in spite of myself, with a vague sense of expectation. "What does this mean?"

"It means something more than chance," replied Naomie, pressing the papers reverently to her lips. "It means honour, restitution, affluence! These papers, husband, prove my father's parentage and mine. Here are his patents of nobility—here is the certificate of my birth; here the title-deeds of the manor of Beaurepaire. This discovery—this alone, was wanting to complete our happiness!"

"We will keep the table, Naomie, all our lives!" I exclaimed, when the first moment of agitation was past.

"As sacredly," replied she, "as it kept this precious secret!"

\* \* \* \* \*

My task is done. Here, on my desk, lies the piled-up manuscript, which has been my companion through so many pleasant hours. Those hours are over now. I may lay down my pen, and put aside the whispering vine-leaves from my casement, and lean out into the sweet Italian afternoon as idly as though I were to the climate and "the manner born."

The world to-day is only half-awake. The little white town, crouched down by the "beached margent" of the bay, winks with its glittering windows, and dozes in the sunshine. The very cicadas are silent. The fishermen's barques, with their wing-like sails all folded to rest, rock lazily at anchor, like sea-birds asleep. The cork-trees nod languidly to each other; and not even yonder far away marble peaks are more motionless than that cloud which hangs like a white banner in the sky. Hush! I can almost believe that I hear the drowsy washing of the tide against the ruined tower on the beach.

And this is the bay of Spezzia, the lovely, treacherous bay of Spezzia, where our English Shelley lost his gentle life! How blue those cruel waters are to-day! Bluer, by heaven! than the sky, with scarce a ripple setting to the shore.

We are very happy in our remote Italian home, Naomie and I. It stands high upon a hill side, and looks down over a slope of silvery olives to the sea. Vineyard and orange grove, white town, blue bay, and amber sands, lie mapped out beneath our feet. Not a felucca "to Spezzia bound from Cape Circello" can sail past without our observation.

"Not a sun can die, nor yet be born, unseen  
By dwellers at my villa."

Nay, from this very window, one might almost pitch an

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orange into the empty vettura standing in the courtyard of the Croce di Malta!

Then we have a garden—a wild, uncultured place, where figs and lemons, olives “blackening sullen ripe,” and prickly aloes, flourish in rank profusion, side by side—and a loggia, where we sit at twilight drinking our Chianti wine, and listening to the nightingales—and a study, looking out on the bay through a trellis of vineleaves, where we read and write together, surrounded by our books. Here, also, just opposite my desk, hangs Müller’s copy of that portrait of the Marquise De Beaurepaire which I once gave to Naomie, and which is now my own again. How often I pause upon the unturned page, how often lay my pen aside, to look from the painting to the dear, living face beneath it! For there she sits, day after day, my wife! my poet! with the side-light falling on her hair, and the warm sea-breezes stirring the soft folds of her dress. Sometimes she lifts her eyes—those wondrous eyes, luminous from within with the light of “the rising soul”—and then we talk awhile of our work, or of our love, believing ever that

“Our work shall still be better for our love,  
And still our love be sweeter for our work.”

Perhaps the original of that same painting in the study may yet be ours some day, with the old chateau in which it hangs, and all the broad lands belonging thereunto. Our claim has been put forward some time now, and our lawyers are confident of success. Shall we be happier, if that success is ours? Can rank add one grace, or wealth one pleasure, to a life which is already so perfect? Alas! I think not, and there are moments when I almost wish that we may never have it in our power to test the question.

But stay! the hours fly fast when one falls musing thus. The sun is low, and the tender Italian twilight will soon close in. Then, when the moon rises, we shall sail out upon the bay in our own tiny felucca; or perhaps go

down through the town to that white villa gleaming out above the dark tops of yonder cypresses, and spend some pleasant hours with Oliphant and his wife. They, too, are very happy; but their happiness is of an older date than ours, and tends to other ends. They have bought lands in the neighbourhood, which they cultivate, and they have children whom they adore. To educate these little ones for the wide world lying beyond that blue bay and the far off mountains, is the one joy, the one care of their lives. Truly has it been said that

“ A happy family  
Is but an earlier heaven.”

THE END.











